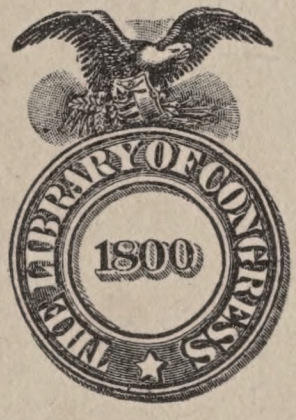
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By CHRISTIAN REID

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BY

CHRISTIAN REID

AUTHOR OF

MISS CHURCHILL, BONNY KATE, A SUMMER IDYL, MORTON HOUSE, VALERIE AYLMER, NINA'S ATONEMENT, HEART OF STEEL, ETC.

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A COMEDY OF ELOPEMENT.

PART I.

I.

THE short December day was drawing to its close; but, though the month was December, the temperature was not that which is usually associated with the season. Instead of gray skies, leaden waters, and brown or snowy earth, there was a sky of glowing beauty, a glittering sea, and a land covered with the evergreen foliage of the South—for it was December in Florida. At noon the sun had shone with uncomfortable power on the broad plaza and old Spanish houses of St. Augustine; but now that his last rays were gilding the ancient fort and the Moorish belfry of the cathedral, the air was full of that delicious softness—a caressing warmth without heat—which

in such latitudes makes the mere fact of existence a delight.

On the gray sea wall there were several loiterers; but, as the sun finally sank, and the purple veil of twilight fell over land and sea, most of these departed, leaving only two girls, who still paced the narrow promenade, talking earnestly.

At least one was talking earnestly—the other only listened. But the mere fact of listening can be eloquent sometimes, and this girl's face seemed made to express all things eloquently. It was a delicately molded face, with a pale complexion and the most gentle and lustrous eyes possible to imagine. As yet she was altogether immature in appearance and manner, being not more than fifteen years of age, but her slender figure gave indications of more than ordinary grace when time should have transformed its angles into curves, just as her face promised to prove even more than beautiful when a woman's soul should shine out of those eyes, now soft as a fawn's and innocent as a child's.

Her companion was more ordinary in ap-

pearance, yet nine people out of ten would have admired her most. She was an exceedingly pretty girl, and, being four or five years the senior of the two, possessed all the advantage of presence and of manner which such a difference in age at this period of life bestows. Her face had none of the delicate regularity of the face beside her, but her features were charmingly piquant, her complexion brilliantly fair, and her sunny, hazel eyes were full of mirth. At least they were usually full of mirth, but this evening there was a shade in them that looked like anxiety. It was she who had been talking for half an hour, while the girl who clung to her arm listened with rapt attention. As they still paced up and down in the twilight she went on:

"You understand now, Aimée, how it is, and how I am almost at my wit's end to know what to do. I declare it is almost enough to make one wish one were ugly, to be tormented as I am!"

"I would not wish that," said Aimée. "It is like a novel—only better—to be as pretty as you are, and to know that two men love you

to distraction; that you are almost engaged to one, but that you love the other and are going to elope with him—"

"Hush!" cried the other, with a pressure of the arm she held almost as sharp as the tone of her voice. "Think, if somebody were to hear you! I am *not* going to elope with him! That is just the point. I have promised—but I can not, I can not! I like him—of course, I like him—but I don't like him well enough to ruin all my life for him, to give up everything and break mamma's heart. Aimée, I can't do it."

"What are you going to do, then?" asked Aimée, while her eyes seemed to grow momently larger and darker and more full of interest.

To an impressionable girl of fifteen, with her head full of romances, all this was thrilling beyond expression. A beautiful girl, a worldly mother, two ardent suitors, and an elopement planned—what could any romance furnish better? Yet it was here in her own every-day world, and *she* was promoted to the dignity of receiving the confidences of the he-

roine. What could life hold more exciting, save the joy, of which she as yet hardly dreamed, of being a heroine herself?

"What are you going to do?" she repeated in a voice as sweet and as full of dramatic expression as her eyes. "If you have promised to go to-night, how can you break your promise?"

"Breaking my promise does not matter at all," said Fanny Berrien, impatiently; "but getting rid of Lennox Kyrle without trouble does matter. And how it is to be done I do not know, unless you will help me."

"I will do anything—anything in the world!" said Aimée, fervently. "But how can you make up your mind to give him up?"

"It does not exactly mean giving him up," said Fanny, "though I suppose it will come to that at last," she added with a sigh. "But *just now* I only want him to understand that it is quite impossible for me to go with him. He is so impetuous and rash, he will not understand at all how I am placed; and if I do not meet him at the time when he expects me,

he will be quite capable of coming for me—as he has threatened to do—and then there *would* be a fearful state of affairs!"

"He must be like young Lochinvar," said Aimée. "I should think you would adore such a lover as that."

"He has given me more trouble than any other man in the world, so I suppose I ought to adore—or else hate him," said Miss Berrien. "Of course, you don't understand about these things, Aimée, and I ought not to be talking of them to a child like you, only I have nobody else to talk to; but Lennox Kyrle is one of the men to whom one can't say no. He has more power over me than any one else in the world, and yet I am not at all sure that I want to marry him."

"Why not?" asked Aimée, who was drinking in these new ideas as a plant absorbs water.

"Oh, for a great many reasons," replied the other. "For one thing, I am not sure that I want to be domineered over for the rest of my life; and then he has nothing in the way of fortune—at least nothing to speak of. Now,

Aimée, you know it is not at all pleasant to want money and not have any."

"No," said Aimée decidedly—she evidently understood this—"it is not at all pleasant."

"And Mr. Meredith is rich, and will be richer; and he is devoted to me, and mamma is anxious that I shall marry him, and I like him very well—when I don't see Lennox! So I have nearly made up my mind not to see him any more."

There was a pause. Aimée felt that this was a very unheroine-like decision, a lame and impotent conclusion for a romance; but she did not know what to say, being somewhat confused by the multiplicity of new ideas presented to her consideration.

"At all events, I can not go to-night, though I was mad enough to promise him that I would," pursued the young lady desperately. "And I can not see him; if I did, I *should* go. I am ashamed to think how little will of my own I have when I am with him—in fact, I have none at all. He simply makes me do whatever he likes. So I dare not go to meet him, and this brings me to the point

I have been trying to reach all this time—will you go for me?"

If she had asked Aimée to spring from the wall into the waves washing softly against it, the girl could hardly have been more surprised. Her face showed this plainly, but after an instant's hesitation she said:

"I will do anything that I can for you—where do you want me to go?"

"It will not be pleasant at all, and I feel as if it was very selfish to ask it of you," said Miss Berrien. "But then you are only a child, and it can not compromise you as it would compromise *me*; and you are as brave as a lion, so you won't be afraid to come here after dark, will you?"

"*Here?*" said Aimée, glancing around.

"Yes, here," answered her companion. "A boat, with Lennox in it, will be here at midnight. You must tell him that I can not come, that I-- But never mind, I will give the message at the time. Will you do it for me?"

If Aimée's courage failed at such a prospect, she felt that it would never do to betray as much. She had pledged herself to do "any-

thing," and she must not fail when something was demanded.

"Yes, I will do it," she said, "if there is no other way; but why can you not write and let him know?"

"Write!" repeated the other. "Why, you foolish child, have I not told you where he is?"

"I don't think you have," said Aimée—conscious, however, that in the multiplicity of statements which had been made to her, the particular statement relative to Mr. Kyrle's whereabouts might not have received due attention.

"He is there," said Fanny with a comprehensive wave of her hand toward the Atlantic Ocean. "Did I not tell you that he is in a yacht?"

"Oh! has he a yacht?" cried Aimée; "and can you refuse to go with him?"

"I might not refuse if it was his own yacht—for a man must be very rich to afford a yacht—but it is not his own. It is borrowed from a friend 'for this occasion only,'" said Fanny, with a slight laugh. "His plan is cer-

tainly very well arranged. He borrows the yacht, as I have said, runs down here, lies off the inlet and brings a boat up to St. Augustine for me—I step into it, we return to the yacht, run to Key West or Pensacola and are married, then cruise for a month among the West Indies. How would you like such a programme as that, Aimée?"

"How would I like it?" repeated Aimée. Words were evidently too weak to express her sentiments; but she clasped her hands and her eyes shone like stars. "It would be glorious!" she cried, with a thrill in her voice. "I never read of anything more beautiful. I don't believe, I *can't* believe, but that you mean to go."

"You may believe it, then," said Miss Berrien, shortly. "It is very well to be romantic when you don't have to pay a price for romance; but when you do, and it is such a heavy one as a life of poverty—sailing and love-making can't last forever, and what is to come after? I asked myself that question, and the answer made me stop."

"I wonder if it was not Mr. Meredith who

made you stop?" said Aimée. "I saw the diamonds he brought you; but, though diamonds are very pretty, they are not as good as a lover like young Lochinvar."

"You will change your mind when you are a little older, my dear. Lovers are plenty, but diamonds— However, it is not certain that I will take them. It is only certain that I can not throw away everything by going with Lennox to-night. He must wait."

"But perhaps he won't wait," said Aimée. "If he is so impetuous, perhaps he will say that it must be this night or never."

"There is no danger that he will say anything of the kind," replied Fanny, with a comfortable assurance of her own power. "He will never give me up until I am married to somebody else. He makes love like an angel," she added, with a stifled sigh. "I have had a great many lovers, of course, but nobody that I ever liked half as well as Lennox. But I must not think of him; and as for seeing him —well, if I did that, I should be on board the Ariel before day. I will give my chance of a cruise over to you, Aimée."

"I only wish I could take it," said Aimée, with the most evident sincerity.

"Now we must go home," said the other, glancing out at the darkening water. "But first come and let me show you exactly where the boat will be to-night."

II.

TWILIGHT had given way to night, and the sky was thickset with golden stars, when the two girls reached the door of their boarding house. A stream of light from the dining room, and a clatter of knives and forks and voices announced that supper was in progress, so they turned at once into that apartment.

A party of about a dozen people—chiefly feminine—were gathered round the table. One of these, a handsome middle-aged lady, looked up when the two entered.

"Why are you so late, Fanny?" she asked. "You know that I do not like you to be out after dark without an escort."

"But it is so hard to get in *before* dark,

mamma," said Miss Berrien, taking her place at the table. "It is lovely on the sea wall at twilight, and the air—oh, what a feeling it gives one! Do you suppose it can be ozone?—ozone in the air, I mean? Well"—as nobody appeared able to answer this question—"whatever it is, it is wonderful in its effect. My appetite is a most serious fact, and I am quite ready to do justice to your good things, Mrs. Shreve."

Mrs. Shreve—an elderly faded widow, who presided at the head of the table—smiled faintly. The faintness of the smile was not owing to any disapproval of her young boarder's appetite, but was due to the fact that, like a good many other estimable people, she lived persistently in the shadow rather than in the sunshine of life.

"I like to see people with good appetites, Miss Fanny," she said in a tone which seemed to imply that appetites were perhaps a slight mitigation of the sadness of existence. "Try the cup cakes; they are nice to-night.—Why, Miss Aimée, *you* are not eating anything!"

"I am not hungry, Mrs. Shreve," replied

Aimée, who could not say that she was incapacitated by excitement from eating, and who looked with amazement at Fanny's gastronomic performances. How a girl on the eve of a promised elopement, with a lover on his way to meet her, could exhibit such a keen appreciation of cup cakes and other delicacies was quite beyond Aimée's comprehension.

Her attention thus directed to the latter, Mrs. Berrien glanced at her.

"What is the matter with you, Aimée?" she asked. "Your eyes are shining as if you had been listening to a ghost story."

"She has been listening to a moral lecture," said Miss Fanny, giving Aimée an admonitory touch under the table, "and she is reflecting upon it."

"Nothing is the matter with me, Aunt Alice," said Aimée. "I have no appetite—that is all."

"Want of appetite is very far from being the trifling thing that most people consider it," said an elderly gentleman on the other side of the table, who certainly himself had no ground for complaint on that score. "There

is no effect without a cause, and no physical derangement which may not be attended with the most serious results. If people would only be warned in time—"

"I suppose nobody would ever die," interposed Fanny, a little flippantly; and then, feeling that to talk of dying to a company chiefly composed of invalids was not the extreme of tact, she went on hastily: "O mamma! who do you suppose I met at the hotel to-day? Your old friend Mr. Denham, who is here for his throat—that same throat of which he has been talking ever since I can remember. I also saw the English gentlemen who are going soon on that hunting expedition which Mr. Meredith thinks of joining, and which I should like to join, too."

"I have no doubt the party would be glad to receive you as a recruit, Miss Berrien," said one of the ladies with a smile. "At least it is easy to answer for one member of it."

"Yes, I think I might count on his vote," returned Miss Berrien, composedly.

After tea this young lady retired for some additions to her toilet, while Aimée—who felt

as if she lived, moved, and had her being in a dream—went into the parlor and sat down ostensibly to read. She was usually a great bookworm, having been a devourer of all kinds of literature from her earliest childhood, and to-night she had a novel which at another time would have absorbed all her attention. But for once the letters danced before her eyes and conveyed no meaning to her mind. The romance of reality in which she was so soon to play a part engrossed all her thoughts. How would she acquit herself? What would she be called upon to do? How could Fanny possibly be so composed when *her* fate was hanging in the balance? These questions formed the burden of Aimée's reflections, while her head was bent and her dark eyes rested on the open page of the book which she held.

Suddenly, however, she roused with a start, for some one said, "How are you, this evening, Mr. Meredith?" and looking up she saw Miss Berrien's lover number two crossing the room.

A man with whom the world went well and easily was Mr. Meredith, evidently.

Rather short, rather stout, rather rubicund, but not ill-looking, and apparently not cast by Nature for that villainous part which is assigned in melodramas to the obnoxious suitor, Aimée's gaze followed him with a species of fascination. This man, commonplace as he appeared, was, unconsciously to himself, one of the *dramatis personæ* in the romance now proceeding. "If he could know!" thought the girl, with a thrill.

Exemplifying the proverb that ignorance is sometimes bliss, Mr. Meredith sank easily into a seat and began talking to one or two people, without observing the solemn young eyes regarding him from a shady corner. "If he could know!" Aimée thought again when Fanny entered, bright, sparkling, coquettish, and gave him her hand as he came eagerly forward to meet her. If there was a single weight on Miss Berrien's mind, a single cloud on her spirit, no one could possibly have suspected it; and Aimée began to wonder somewhat if the whole thing was not a jest, when, in the midst of the lively banter which with Fanny generally did duty for conversation, she

sent a sudden, swift glance across the room, which made the wondering girl understand that it was reality after all.

The glance conveyed a warning, and fearing lest she might unguardedly betray to Mrs. Berrien's quick observation that something unusual was in the atmosphere, Aimée rose and with her book in her hand went quietly from the room. As her slender young figure passed, two ladies near the door looked up and nodded a kindly good-night.

"What a sweet girl that is!" said one of them. "She seems the embodiment of gentleness."

"She is so pretty, too," said the other. "At least, she promises to be pretty—and there is so much mind and soul in her face!"

"Poor child! I fancy it is doubtful what will become of her," said the first speaker. "Her father is dead, and her mother has married again—married a certain Major Joscelyn, who is very much gone to pieces in all respects. I know the family well, and Mrs. Berrien was talking to me about the Joscelyns—whom she dislikes exceedingly—the other day.

Aimée, you see, is her brother's child, and for that reason she has her with her at present. 'I found that the Joscelyns were simply making her a drudge,' she said, 'and her health was breaking down under it, so I decided to take her for a time at least. Perhaps, when Fanny is married, I may adopt her altogether.'"

"She can well afford to do so if Miss Fanny establishes herself in life as well as *that*," responded the other, glancing significantly across the room.

Aimée meanwhile—altogether unconscious of being a subject of discussion—went to the chamber which she shared with her cousin, and, without striking a light, sat down by the open window through which even at night the air came with balmy softness. She felt strangely puzzled, and strongly averse to the service which she had pledged herself to perform; yet the idea of retreating did not for a moment occur to her. She had promised Fanny, and she must perform whatever was exacted from her in fulfillment of that promise. But how much she shrank from this fulfillment it is difficult to say. This impetu-

ous lover, whom Fanny herself was afraid to face, what would he say, what would he do? Would he rage with passion, or be overwhelmed by despair? Aimée decided that she would prefer passion to despair, for she had a most tender heart, and the sight of distress always unnerved her. She pictured to herself the Ariel lying off the bar, with the eager lover pacing her deck, sure that happiness was within his grasp, fancying no doubt that Fanny, like himself, was counting the hours to their time of meeting; and then a picture of the scene in the parlor below—of Fanny gay and enchanting, of Mr. Meredith fascinated and amused—rose before her mental vision. "How can she?" the girl thought. "How can she? To bring a man here just to disappoint him! It is—yes, it is shameful!"

As she so sat and so thought, a clock tolled out ten strokes. Soon thereafter the different inmates of the house—being chiefly of middle age and quiet habits—were to be heard exchanging good-night salutations on the staircase and in the hall, several doors closed, and then Aimée heard her aunt's foot-

steps approach her chamber. There was no light, and the girl hoped it would pass on—for she had the feeling of a conspirator, and dreaded to be addressed by one whom she felt as if she was betraying—but Mrs. Berrien paused, opened the door and looked in.

"Are you asleep, Aimée?" she asked.

"Oh, no, Aunt Alice," replied Aimée's voice from the window. "I am sitting here."

"What! in the dark, and by an open window! Are you trying to take cold? What is the matter?"

"Nothing at all," answered Aimée, conscious that guilt was in every cadence of her voice. "It is so warm that I did not think I could take cold, and I—I like to look at the stars."

"Close the window at once and go to bed," said Mrs. Berrien. "You need not wait for Fanny. She will probably not be up for some time. Why are you so foolish and so peculiar, my dear? It is better for you to stay down-stairs in the evening."

"I will hereafter, if you desire it," replied Aimée, lowering the window as she spoke.

She was always docile to the least suggestion, but at that moment she would have promised obedience in anything, to atone for the deception she was aiding to practice.

"Well, good-night," said Mrs. Berrien. "Have you matches at hand?"

"Oh, yes," answered the girl, glad not to be obliged to show her face.

As her aunt went away, she threw herself on the outside of her bed, and lay there almost motionless, but wide awake for another hour — the delightful hour for which Mr. Meredith invariably waited, for in it he had the society of his pretty ladylove to himself. Fanny, however, who always sent him away punctually on the stroke of eleven, was to-night not remiss in doing so. Ten minutes after that hour the door of the chamber opened, and that young lady appeared, bearing a light which flashed full in Aimée's face.

"Oh!" she cried, "how you startled me with your great, solemn eyes! You foolish child, have you not been asleep? I hoped when you went away so early you would take

a good sleep, and be fresh and ready for my little errand."

"I am ready," answered Aimée, "but as for having gone to sleep, how *could* I? It is all too exciting!"

"One would think it was you who were going to elope," said Fanny, putting down her lamp." As for me, I am so tired of men, that if it were not for mamma I would go into a convent, where I would never hear of them again. You can not fancy how Mr. Meredith has been tormenting me, until I have half promised to marry him just to get rid of him."

"But you will not get rid of him if you marry him," said Aimée, with her eyes more great and more solemn than ever.

"Simpleton!" returned Fanny. "Of course not; but between promising and doing a thing there is a very great difference, as poor Lennox will find out to-night. Dear me!"—sitting down meditatively on the side of Aimée's bed—"I wonder what made me such a fool as to imagine for a moment that I would go with him? The mere thought makes me shudder—to be running off wildly and being

seasick (the idea of my forgetting that I always am seasick!) instead of going to bed comfortably and getting up to-morrow to torment Mr. Meredith by flirting with one of those handsome Englishmen!"

"O Fanny, are you not ashamed!" said Aimée. "To think what Mr. Kyrle must be feeling at this moment, while you—"

"Yes, really, I *am* ashamed!" said Fanny, hastily. "It is abominable conduct, I know. But you see I am shallow—shallow as that"—indicating about a quarter the depth of her little finger—"and I can't help it if one nail drives out another in my mind. I wonder if it is my mind or my heart, by the by? Well, anyway, in *me*. It is not my fault that I am shallow; and, on the whole, I think I rather like it. One has a much easier life. Isn't it a great deal wiser for me to make the best of things as they are, for instance, than to be distracted about Lennox Kyrle, who I really like better than anybody else in the world, if I let myself think of him?"

"I—I don't know," said Aimée, who found

this question too deep for her solving. "You must decide, of course."

"I *have* decided," said Fanny. "Things are best as they are. But now we must have done with talking and proceed to action. In the first place, I will tell you exactly what you must say to Mr. Kyrle when you meet him."

"Yes," answered Aimée, beginning to shiver at that anticipation.

"You are to say," went on Fanny, "that I feel it is impossible for me to take such a desperate step as to elope with him; that it would break mamma's heart; and—and that it would ruin his life, for I should only tie him down to hopeless poverty. Say that I am sorry, and blame myself dreadfully, that my feelings will not permit me to see him, and that—be sure to make this point emphatic!—he must not dream of attempting to see me. My resolution can not be changed. I am sure I can trust you to put it all as well as possible, Aimée—you have a great deal of tact and judgment."

"But why not write it?" demanded Aimée,

whose dismay was not soothed by this compliment.

"My dear child, could he read a letter in the dark?" asked the other, impatiently. "Besides, I *never* write; I have learned too much of the mischief that lurks in ink. Tell him all this as quickly as you can—and be sure to make it very positive about his not trying to see me—and then run back to the house as fast as possible. How lucky it is that we live so near the water, else I could not let you go!"

It is safe to say that, in this view of the case, such lucky proximity was something for which Aimée did not feel very grateful as she rose to prepare for the expedition. Her courage was sadly failing, not so much on account of the lonely walk through the midnight streets, as from the realization of the strange and awkward position in which she would be placed. She was trembling like a leaf from nervousness and excitement as Miss Berrien enveloped her in a large, dark cloak, and drew the hood over her head.

"Now," said Fanny, glancing at her watch,

"it is time for you to go. I hate—oh, I hate dreadfully to send you! If there were any other way—"

"But there is none," said Aimée, trying to smile. "And I am not afraid."

"It seems so cowardly to send you," said Fanny, half under her breath. "Yet I can not trust my own resolution if I met Lennox!—and then if it should be discovered—"

Her pause said more than many words. At that moment the Meredith diamonds, and all that the Meredith diamonds represented, shone brightly before her eyes. To risk the loss of them by keeping this midnight tryst, was more than she could dare. And the girl before her looked up with brave, generous glance from under the dark hood.

"Don't think of it, Fanny," she said. "If *you* were discovered, what would everybody say? while if *I* am, it does not matter. Nobody knows or cares about me! Come, now, and let me out. You'll wait downstairs to let me in, will you not?"

"Yes, indeed, I shall wait and count every instant. For Heaven's sake come back as

quickly as you can! And be certain, very certain, that it is Lennox Kyrle to whom you speak. It would be awful if you gave the message to any one but him!"

III.

BEING a little excited, and not at all sleepy, it chanced that Mr. Meredith, after parting with Miss Berrien, betook himself to the sea wall, where he proceeded to pace to and fro, smoking a cigar and wrapped in very agreeable thought. Despite her coquetry, Fanny had yielded to his suit more than ever before, and he felt no doubt that in the end she would yield altogether. He liked to be played with in this manner. It was not enough to discourage—Fanny was too wise for that—but just enough to give a zest of uncertainty, to sustain and keep alive the interest which in similar affairs had more than once failed him. In short, he was completely conscious of being in love, and very much pleased with the same, finding in it none of the

"pang, the agony, the doubt," which are poetically supposed to accompany the tender passion, but only an agreeable stimulation. He was even conscious of feeling distinctly sentimental, and disposed to cast lingering glances at Mrs. Shreve's house whenever he came to the spot where it entered into his range of vision.

On one of these occasions he was surprised by a sudden and very unexpected sight—the opening of the street door and the emerging thence of a figure. For an instant he had a startled sensation; the next he said to himself, "It is only a servant, of course." But a moment later he knew that it was not a servant. How he knew it, is difficult to tell; but he felt instinctively sure from the walk, the bearing, and the motions. He stood still, a prey to very odd sensations, and watched the approach of the figure that had in every line a familiar aspect. If it was not Fanny, who could it be? He knew that all the other inmates of the house were elderly people, except Aimée, of whom he did not think at all. But to conceive that it could be Fanny,

alone and disguised in the streets at midnight, was impossible. He said to himself that it was impossible, yet his pulses were beating in a most unaccountable manner, and there was a sound in his ears like the rush of many waters. It was natural that at this moment he did not pause to ask himself whether or not it would be honorable to act the part of a spy: he only felt that he must know who it was that came forth from Mrs. Shreve's house at midnight, with Fanny Berrien's air and movement.

Meanwhile the shrouded figure walking so swiftly, with head bent down, did not see him. Poor Aimée's pulses were beating tumultuously like his own, and she was thinking of nothing save her desire to accomplish her errand and return to the shelter of the house she had left. The night seemed to her invested with terror, and the sound of her own light footsteps on the quiet street brought her heart into her throat. It is doubtful if she would have noticed Mr. Meredith had he stood immediately in her path; she certainly cast no glance either to right or left, but hurried forward to the place Fanny had designated, intent only

upon one object, to deliver her message and return.

As she mounted the sea wall she heard the sound of oars, and when she paused, shrinking and trembling on the steps that led down to the water, she saw in the starlight the dark outline of a boat containing two or three figures. Her heart gave a wild bound and then seemed to stand still—for was not this the moment of fate; was not the impetuous lover, who would take no denial, before her?

Certainly one of the figures sprang from the boat as she appeared, and reached her side with all the impetuosity conceivable in the most desperate lover. Before she could speak she found her hands in a close clasp, and a voice was saying, in a tone of eagerness and delight:

"So you have come; you are really here!"

Even at this moment it struck Aimée that there was surprise as well as delight in the voice. Evidently Mr. Kyrle had been by no means sure that Miss Berrien would appear. But the rapture of his greeting made it harder for Aimée to explain that she was not the per-

son so eagerly welcomed, and when she tried to speak her voice failed. She could only gasp, after a moment:

"I have come to tell you—"

"Never mind what," interrupted the young man eagerly, with probably a prudent fear of what the communication might be. "You are here; that is enough. There will be time to tell me anything and everything when we are afloat. Come, here is the boat."

He drew her toward him, and so compelling was his grasp that Aimée felt that in another moment she might be in the boat and *en route* for the West Indies. This gave her the courage of desperation. She made a determined effort to release herself as she said more clearly:

"You are mistaken. I am not the person you think. I have only come to tell you that *she* can not come."

"Not the person I think!" repeated the young man. He released her hands and fell back a step in his amazement. The violent revulsion of feeling which he underwent was evident in his voice, and the sharpness of his

disappointment so pierced Aimée's heart that she forgave the sharpness of his tone, as he went on:

"Then who are you—and why are you here?"

"I am Fanny's cousin," the girl replied, then suddenly checked herself. "But you—who are *you?*" she said. "I was told to ask your name before I gave any message."

"There is no doubt who I am," he replied, sternly. "My name is Lennox Kyrle. What message have you for me?"

"Only that—that Fanny can not come," answered Aimée, tremulously. She paused and clasped her hands nervously together, trying to recall all that Fanny had impressed on her mind to be delivered, but only the principal points remained, and before she could gather them into shape, as it were, Mr. Kyrle justified his character for impetuosity by breaking in:

"That she can not come," he repeated. "Is that all, after having brought me here? *Why* can not she come?"

The indignant emphasis of the last question was, under the circumstances, natural

enough; and, confronted with it, Aimée felt in every fiber the shame of the answer which she was bound to give:

"Because she—has changed her mind," she said desperately, grasping the main fact and forgetting all the fluent words with which Fanny had clothed it. "She bade me tell you that she is very sorry, but that she can not elope with you and break her mother's heart."

"Her consideration for her mother is most admirable," said the young man with grim sarcasm. "It is only a pity that it did not influence her a little sooner. And so she is 'sorry' that she can not elope! She could say no more for the calamity of missing a ball."

"Fanny has not very deep feelings," said Aimée, in a voice of as sincere compunction as if the feelings in question had been her own, "but I think she *is* sorry."

This simple statement, made in that sweet, pathetic voice, said a great deal more than the speaker intended to Lennox Kyrle. He was silent for an instant, then spoke in a softer tone:

"I know that she is easily influenced by

those around her," he said, "and so this might have been anticipated. But if I were to see her—"

"Oh, that is impossible!" interrupted Aimée, hastily. "She charged me to tell you above all things not to attempt to see her."

"Ah!" said the young man. Keen disappointment and mortification were in his tone, but also something of comprehension. "Then there is another lover," he said.

Aimée did not reply. It was no part of the message with which she was charged to enlighten Mr. Kyrle with regard to the other string to Miss Berrien's bow; and since his assertion was fortunately an assertion, not a question, she suffered it to pass unanswered, forgetting that silence, in this case as in many others, was equivalent to assent.

"That accounts for everything," said the young man after a pause—in which, perhaps, he had waited for contradiction—"and I only regret that I should have given Miss Berrien the pain which I am sure she must feel acutely of treating me in this way. But it may relieve her sorrow, perhaps, to know that it is

the last opportunity she will ever have to inflict a pang upon me. I have been the slave of her caprice and my own folly long enough. As I came here I resolved that this should be the decisive test. If she cared for me, she would go with me; if not, it was well to know the truth and be no longer the plaything of a coquette. Well, I am here, and she refuses even to see me. She breaks her word and throws me over without compunction. It is the end. Tell her that from me."

It flashed across Aimée's mind, as he spoke, that this was very much the ultimatum which she had prophesied, but she had not been prepared for the stern resolution of the voice which uttered it. Plainly, Mr. Lennox Kyrle meant all that he said, and Miss Berrien's comfortable belief that he would remain her slave as much as ever was a delusion of her own vanity.

"I will tell her," the girl answered, in a subdued tone. "I wish I had been able to—to give you her message better. She said a great deal—"

"Which I can easily imagine," interposed

Mr. Kyrle. "It is not necessary that you should make an effort to remember it."

Thus discouraged, Aimée felt that she need no longer remain, that she had done all that was required of her, and might now return with speed to the shelter of the roof for which she longed.

"I must go now," she said, yet still she hesitated. She longed to say a word of sympathy, but it was not easy to do so. At length, however, she summoned courage, and spoke quickly:

"I am sorry, very sorry for you," she said. "It is dreadful to trust and—be deceived. I would not have come on such an errand, only it was necessary you should know, and Fanny could not come."

It is not too much to say that these words brought her personal individuality for the first time to the attention of the man before her. Up to this time he had not given a thought to the consideration of who or what she was. To him she was simply the mouthpiece of and means of communication with Fanny Berrien. Now it suddenly occurred to him that here

was a young, shrinking girl, who had come alone at midnight to bring him the message of the woman who had failed him.

"She could not come, but she could send *you*," he said, suddenly rousing to something like indignation, "though I hear from your voice that you are young, and this is no fitting time or place for you. Do not let me detain you longer—or, rather, let me take you at once back to your home."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Aimée, mindful of Fanny's promise to watch and wait for her, and fearing an encounter of the two at Mrs. Shreve's respectable door. "You must not think of it. I have only a short way to go, and the streets are quiet."

"Do you think I will force my way in to her?" said the young man, scornfully. "I assure you that I have not the least desire to do so. What have I to say to her? Nothing, except that I shall never trouble her again, and *that* I can trust you to say for me."

"I shall say it," Aimée answered, feeling not altogether disinclined to do so, "but I beg you not to come with me. I shall be at

home in a minute. Indeed, you *must not* come."

"I will not insist, then," he said, hearing in her tone how greatly she was disturbed. "But you must go at once. This is a service that only selfishness would have asked of you."

"I came willingly," said the girl. "It might have compromised Fanny, but I am of no importance—it can not harm *me*. I am only sorry that I had to bring you such a painful disappointment."

"If a man is a fool, he must suffer, and deserves to suffer," said Mr. Kyrle, with a decision that did credit to his common sense. "But you are as kind as you are brave, and I shall not forget you. Now, go."

Aimée needed no second bidding. She turned and hastened back in the direction of Mrs. Shreve's house and Mr. Meredith, who had watched the meeting and conversation from afar, divided the while between an overwhelming desire to break in upon it and the salutary fear of making himself ridiculous, had the satisfaction of seeing the door open and close upon her.

IV.

"Oh, what a time you have been, Aimée!" cried Miss Berrien as she opened the door. "I have been in an agony! What kept you so long?"

"Have I been long?" said Aimée. She was almost breathless, and as she sank down on the first seat at hand, pale and trembling now that the need for exertion was past, Fanny's heart smote her for her words of reproach.

"Of course it has seemed long to me," she said, "but I do not suppose it really has been long; and what does it matter about me in comparison to you—you poor, brave child! What a selfish wretch I was to send you! You look perfectly overcome, and I have not even a glass of wine to give you."

"I dont want any wine," said Aimée. "After a while—when my heart stops beating so dreadfully—I will tell you—all about it."

"Yes," said Fanny, eagerly, "but at least you can tell me this now—did you see him?"

Aimée nodded, being for the moment past speech; and Miss Berrien at once locked the door, as if she feared Mr. Kyrle might be on the other side. Then she watched Aimée anxiously, and when the latter presently opened her lips as if to speak, interposed with a warning whisper:

"No, no—not here. We must go upstairs. Are you able to walk?"

"Oh, yes—why not?" answered Aimée. "I was out of breath when I came in; that was all."

"You looked as if you were about to faint," said Fanny, taking up her lamp. "How thankful I am that it is over, and that you are safely back!"

Aimée might have assured the speaker that her thankfulness on this point was trifling compared to her own, but the action of her heart not being yet sufficiently regulated to make speech easy, she silently followed Miss Berrien's stealthy footsteps upstairs.

Once safely in their own room, Fanny was full of eager questioning.

"You saw him!" she exclaimed. "Did

you give him my message? How did he take it? What did he say?"

"Yes, I saw him," replied Aimée. "He was waiting, and at first could scarcely believe that it was not you—"

"Poor fellow!" cried Fanny, in feeling parenthesis.

"But when he understood that it was not you, and that you meant to throw him over," proceeded Aimée, not without a sense of pleasure in the recital, "he was very indignant, and he told me to tell you that you would never have another opportunity to treat him in such a manner, and that he came here meaning this to be the decisive test: that if you cared for him you would come with him, and that if you did not come he would never ask you again. It was to-night or never."

"'To-night or never!'" repeated Miss Berrien. For a moment she was too much amazed to say anything more. Then her customary easy philosophy reasserted itself. "He must have been awfully angry," she observed, "and when a man is angry he will say anything. But for his sake I am rather glad that

he takes it in this way; he will not feel the disappointment so much. I was afraid that he would be desperate, and insist on seeing me. It is a great deal better that he should be furious, and talk about 'to-night or never' —which, of course, is all nonsense. It may be never, indeed"—with a slight sigh—" but, if so, it will not be *his* fault."

" You would not think so if you had heard him," said Aimée. " Whether you marry Mr. Meredith or not, I am sure that Mr. Kyrle will never ask you to marry him again."

" You do not know Mr. Kyrle as well as I do, my dear," said Fanny, complacently. "He will be quite certain to ask me whenever he has a chance. I only hope he may not have a chance soon. I hope you told him that he must go away at once?"

"No," answered Aimée, "I did not tell him anything of the kind. In the first place, you never told me to do so, and, in the second place, I would not if you had. It was bad enough to bring him here only to disappoint him. You have no right to order him to go away."

"Upon my word, you seem to espouse Mr. Kyrle's cause very warmly!" said Fanny. "Right or no right, I wish I had sent him word to go away at once. It would be terrible if he stopped here and met Mr. Meredith."

"It would not surprise him," said Aimée. "As soon as I told him that you said he must not attempt to see you, he exclaimed, 'Then there is another lover!'"

"Did he?" said Fanny, with a laugh. "How like him! He always had that kind of penetration. One might try to deceive him, but he would go straight to the root of the matter. But then, of course, jealousy helped him in this case. He knows me well enough to be sure that, if I had not somebody else, I would not want him to go away."

"So it is not *him*—it is just somebody—that you want," said Aimée, indignantly.

"Not exactly," replied Fanny. "But you are a child—you don't understand."

"I should be sorry to think that I would ever understand such heartlessness," said Aimée.

"Your sympathies must have been greatly wrought upon by Lennox," said Miss Berrien, composedly. "It is not surprising; I know how he can influence one. Ah, I shall never have such another lover! You may think me heartless, and, luckily for myself, I am not very much troubled with my heart, but if I chose to let myself go, I could be as desperate about Lennox Kyrle as—as he is about me. If his rich uncle would only die and leave him a fortune— But there is no hope of that."

"If he has a rich uncle, why is there no hope of his dying and leaving a fortune?" asked Aimée.

"Oh, he will die some day—no fear about *that*," said Fanny, vindictively, "and he will leave a fortune of a million or two. But poor Lennox will not get it. That is all hopelessly settled. The old wretch has made his will in the most elaborate form, and left his money to found some kind of an institute that is to bear his name and have his statue. It is all a miserable piece of vanity and self-glorification; but he will be called a 'public

benefactor,' and all that stuff, after ruining Lennox's life—and mine."

"I don't think he will ruin yours," said Aimée; "but poor Mr. Kyrle, what will he do?"

Fanny shook her head in a way to intimate that this gentleman's prospects were dark indeed.

"He might have done very well," she said, "but then, you see, he is impracticable, and that is what would make it such madness to marry him. His uncle told him frankly that he had not the faintest intention of leaving him a fortune, but that he would give him an opportunity to make one for himself. 'I'll give you a better start in life than *I* had,' he said, 'and if you don't take advantage of it, that will be your fault.' So he offered him a place in his business house, which, of course, meant the entire control and reversion of the business; and would you believe that Lennox declined the offer?"

"Why?" inquired Aimée, wisely refraining from any expression of opinion.

"Because he has no liking for commercial

life—as if that had anything to do with it! He tried it for a while, then gave it up, saying he could not waste the best years of his life in work that he disliked. So he has gone into literature, and is connected with a newspaper. Conceive the difference! And fancy *me* dragging through life as the wife of a 'special correspondent'!"

"But he may be a famous author some day," said Aimée, with brightening eyes.

"He may—and again he may not," responded Fanny, dryly. "And even if he were a famous author, it does not follow that he would be anything save a poor man. Now, I was not made to be the wife of a poor man; any one can see that."

"I—suppose not," said Aimée, slowly. These were mercenary ideas to be introduced into the world of her young dreams of romance; but she took them in as she had already taken in the facts of faithlessness and heartlessness, and no doubt assimilated them, by some mental process, to such knowledge of human nature and human life as she already possessed.

"But now I think we have talked enough," said Fanny. "If you are not ready to go to sleep, I am. I feel so light and comfortable to think that I have safely disposed of the Lennox difficulty! It has been a dreadful weight on my mind ever since I received his letter saying that he was coming. I was at my wits' end. I did not know what to do until I thought of taking you into my confidence. You have been a perfect jewel, Aimée. I shall never forget the service you have done me, and if ever I have a chance to repay it in kind, I will."

Aimée laughed. She had not a keen sense of humor, but it occurred to her that Fanny was about as likely to do for another what had been done for her this night, as she—Aimée—was likely to elope.

"I am sure that you will never be called upon to repay it in kind," she said. "I can not imagine myself promising to elope; but if I did promise, *I would go!*"

"I dare say," replied Fanny. "You are romantic, and you would enjoy—or you think you would enjoy — dangers and difficul-

ties. 'But as for me, I like the comforts of life."

Ten minutes later Aimée was listening to the soft, regular breathing which told how the speaker was enjoying one of the comforts of life. It was incomprehensible to the girl who was still tingling with excitement from head to foot, and felt as if sleep would never visit her eyelids; but her thoughts did not long dwell on Fanny. They went back to the lover, for whom her tender heart ached as she pictured him returning alone to the yacht which waited the coming bride in order to spread its wings for the South. What a cruel thing it was to let him come—only to disappoint him! Indignation and pity were mingled in her mind; and as hour after hour of the silent night passed, she still lay wide awake, her great, solemn eyes, as Fanny called them, fixed on darkness, but her fancy seeing plainly the starlit deck of the Ariel, where a figure paced alone.

V.

TOWARD daylight, weariness overcame even excited imagination, and Aimée fell asleep. When she awoke it was from a dream in which she fancied herself on board the Ariel, and that Fanny had come to take her away. "Aimée, Aimée!" said the familiar voice; and when she woke, it was to find Fanny's voice indeed sounding in her ears, and Fanny's eyes anxiously gazing at her.

"What is the matter?" she cried, rousing herself at once. "Have I slept very late? Is breakfast ready?"

"Breakfast is over long ago," Fanny answered. "I would not disturb you, for I thought you had certainly earned the right to sleep as late as you pleased; and fortunately mamma never comes down to breakfast, you know. But I have come to rouse you now, because something dreadful has happened. O Aimée, what do you think?—Mr. Meredith saw you last night!"

"Mr. Meredith!" cried Aimée. She sat

up in bed, a picture of consternation. "It is impossible!" she gasped. "I saw no one. He could not have seen me."

"There is no doubt about it," said Fanny. "He certainly saw you—saw you talking to Lennox, and he thought it was *me*."

"You?"

"Yes. And I could not make him believe otherwise except by telling him that it was you. Even then he seemed to doubt; so I said I would bring you to tell him yourself. O Aimée, it is mean beyond words to ask such a thing of you; and yet there will be no good in what you did last night, if you refuse to do this!"

"But—I do not understand," said Aimée. "How will it make any difference? I went for *you*."

"But he does not know that," said Fanny. "He thinks—oh, my dear, you must forgive me!—that you went for yourself."

"You told him so?" said Aimée, in a voice that did not sound like her own.

"How could I help it?" answered Fanny. "He had been nursing his anger and jealousy

all night, and when he came this morning I hardly knew him. He was ready to leave me at a word, and I should never have seen him again. So what *could* I do but tell him that the person he saw was you?"

"You could have told him the truth," said Aimée. "I am sure he ought to have been satisfied to hear that you sent Mr. Kyrle away."

Fanny shook her head. "You don't know men," she said. "And I did not know Mr. Meredith before this morning. He was so angry, that I saw at once he would never forgive me if he knew the truth; so there was nothing to do but deny the whole thing. I suppose it was cowardly; but I *am* a coward. There is no doubt of that."

Aimée agreed that there could be no doubt of it; but the frankly admitted fact did not make her own position better. As far as she could understand, Fanny had boldly transferred the whole matter—intended elopement, broken promise, midnight tryst—to her shoulders, and asked her to acknowledge it. She could hardly realize all that was demanded of her.

"Do you mean to say," she asked, "that you told Mr. Meredith that *I* had promised to go away with Mr. Kyrle?"

"What else could I tell him?" replied Fanny, desperately. "O Aimée, don't you see: what is the good of what was done last night, if I acknowledge it this morning? I should lose Mr. Meredith just as much as if I had gone with Lennox. So I thought I might trust you. I thought you would help me. It is only to say it was you last night; the rest will be understood."

"The rest—that is, the falsehood!" cried Aimée, indignantly. "O Fanny, how can you ask it—how *can* you? I did not mind what I did last night, though it was hard enough. I would do that, or anything else of the kind, over again. But this I can not, I will not, do!"

"Then," said Fanny, sitting down with a gesture of despair, "there is simply no hope, and I wish I had gone with Lennox. It is useless for me to face Mr. Meredith again. If I told him that you refused to come, he would never believe that it was not me last

night. Well," with a long-drawn sigh, "I suppose it serves me right. But I am sorry for poor mamma."

Sobs followed, while Aimée sat staring at the wall before her. Fanny's grief did not touch her as much as it should have done, perhaps, for she understood exactly the degree and quality of the regard which that young lady entertained for Mr. Meredith, and she did not yet realize that disappointment over the loss of possible diamonds might be as acute as that over the loss of a lover. But the allusion to Mrs. Berrien had more effect. Aimée knew that her aunt's heart was set upon Fanny's marrying Mr. Meredith, and for her aunt Aimée felt that she was bound to do much—for was she not the only person in the world who had ever given a thought to her sad girlhood, or attempted to throw a little sunshine upon it? There was not much in common between Mrs. Berrien and her niece; but on the side of the latter there was a deep sense of gratitude. "Should I hesitate to do *anything* for Aunt Alice, who has done so much for me?" she asked herself.

It was this she was thinking while Fanny sobbed.

Presently she said abruptly, "Is Mr. Meredith downstairs yet?"

"I don't know," replied Miss Berrien. "I told him to wait for me, but he may have gone. I hope he has. I can never face him again."

"I am sure," said Aimée, tremulously, "if you would only make up your mind to tell him the truth—"

Fanny interrupted her by a petulant motion. "Pray talk of something that you understand," she said. "If you will not help me, of course I can not force you to do so, but allow me to be the best judge of my own conduct."

Poor Aimée! Her own eyes filled with tears—tears far more genuine than Fanny's. How, after all, could she refuse this service which was asked of her? It was hard, infinitely harder than the one of the night before, but it seemed to her that she was bound to do it—to immolate herself and the truthfulness which was one of the strongest instincts of

her nature—in order that her aunt's desire might be accomplished. With an effort she said, at length:

"And if I were to do what you ask—if I told Mr. Meredith that it was I last night—should I have to tell him anything else?"

"No, no," cried Fanny, with eyes sparkling through her tears. "That is all. Leave the rest to me. I don't ask you to *say* a thing which is untrue."

"It is all the same if I let it be understood," said Aimée, dejectedly. "But I suppose I must do it—if Mr. Meredith has not gone."

"Oh, I don't think he has gone," said Fanny, forgetting her contrary statement of a moment back. "I told him that you had not risen this morning because you were awake nearly all night. So, if you will dress quickly, he will not think we have been long."

Thus animated, Aimée rose, dressed as quickly as her trembling hands would permit, and followed Fanny—who dried her tears with wonderful celerity—down-stairs. When they reached the parlor door Miss Berrien took her

companion's hand in an encouraging pressure. "Don't be afraid," she whispered. "I will not let him annoy you."

At a more auspicious moment Aimée might have resented this offer of protection from the person who was dragging her into the lion's jaws; but she had no opportunity to do so, for the next instant they were in Mr. Meredith's presence.

It had never occurred to Aimée before that this was at all an awe-inspiring presence; but now she felt herself trembling from head to foot before the rotund, genial gentleman, who looked unusually pale and grave, and whom she was going to aid in deceiving. It was this last consideration which made a coward of her, and fastened her eyes to the floor as she entered the room.

"Here is my cousin, Mr. Meredith," said Fanny, whose conscience did not apparently make a coward of her. "She has kindly come to satisfy you as to who it was that you saw leave this house, go to the sea wall, and return last night."

Aimée lifted her glance and looked at Mr.

Meredith then—who, in turn, looked at her. More than ever her eyes were at this moment the eyes of a startled fawn, and as they gazed at him full of wistful appeal and fright and pain, he said to himself that with such eyes deception was not possible. He had thought only of Fanny before, but now he felt a sudden thrill of pity and compunction for this girl whom his suspicions had placed in such a position.

"I am very sorry," he stammered. "I had no desire to interfere in anything which did not concern me; but I thought—I believed—It was you, then, whom I saw last night?"

"Yes, it was I," answered Aimée. She spoke with a clear distinctness for which Fanny blessed her, and met his steady gaze unflinchingly. As long as it was the truth—so she said to herself—she did not mind.

Mr. Meredith, on his part, was staggered by her self-possession. Shrinking as she looked, there was no faltering in her speech, no shame in her manner. From her calm and ready answer, it might have been the most natural thing in the world for a young girl to

leave her home at midnight to hold a tryst on the sea wall.

"I beg your pardon," said the amazed man, who began to think that a girl capable of this coolness was capable of anything else—although up to this time he had looked upon her as an insignificant child, fit rather for dolls than love affairs—"but it was so strange to see a lady go out at such a time that—one could not help drawing certain conclusions. And the thought of *you* never occurred to me, for I should have said you were much too young for anything of the kind. And—by Jove! you *are* too young!" he added, with honest warmth. "Your aunt should be informed.—It is not right," addressing Fanny, "that such an affair should be allowed to go on."

"I thought I told you that it was at an end," said that young lady, coolly. "Aimée sent Mr. Kyrle away; and I promised her that if she came down to satisfy your doubt, she should not be annoyed further."

"I have no desire to annoy her," said Mr. Meredith, "but she is so young that really—

This Mr. Kyrle can not be a man of honor, to try to make such a child elope!"

"Aimée looks more of a child than she is," said Fanny, hurriedly; "and—and I have told you that it is all over. Mr. Kyrle is gone.—And now, Aimée, that you have satisfied Mr. Meredith, I think you may be allowed to go also."

Perhaps it was something in her tone which roused renewed suspicion in Mr. Meredith's breast. He looked from one to the other; his brow lowered, and he said, stiffly:

"If you have no objection, I should like to ask Miss"—he found he did not know her name—"Miss Aimée a question or two."

"You have no right to question her about her own affairs," said Fanny, who feared what Aimée might reply to those questions. "I promised that she should not be annoyed.—Come, Aimée!"

But Aimée read rightly the lowering cloud on the suitor's brow and held her ground, resisting Fanny's attempt to draw her away, and looking up with her clear glance into the suspicious eyes bent on her.

"You think, perhaps," she said, meeting his suspicions boldly, "that I am saying this to shield Fanny; that it was not I who met Mr. Kyrle last night. But you are mistaken. It was I. I will swear it, if you like."

"There is no need of that," said Mr. Meredith, still somewhat suspicious, but again disarmed by those candid eyes. "I should be satisfied by your word. Only, it is strange—"

He paused—for at that moment the door opened, and a servant appeared, saying:

"If you please, Miss Berrien, Mr. Kyrle asks to see you."

VI.

FANNY'S courage was of good metal that it did not fail altogether at this juncture. She felt for a moment as if it must, and if Mr. Kyrle had followed the servant into the room it is certain that she would have thrown up her game in despair. Thought is so quick that even in the midst of her consternation there

was a flash of keen regret that she had not followed Aimée's advice and told Mr. Meredith the truth; but it was too late for candor now. What would have been graceful confidence an hour before, would now seem only the desperate resource of exposure. She looked at the door, fully expecting to see Lennox's face; but when she understood that he would not enter without permission, her courage rose to the difficulty and her ready wit perceived a way of escape.

"It is *you* whom he wishes to see, Aimée," she said, addressing that terror-stricken young person. "Go to him at once, and take him into Mrs. Shreve's sitting-room. You can speak to him there quietly. But pray *make him go away* as soon as possible. Remember, mamma may be down any moment."

She fairly pushed Aimée from the room before the girl could utter a word or collect her thoughts, and then turned with great self-possession to Mr. Meredith.

"He is an impetuous young man, who will not take 'No' when it has been said to him," she observed, "so it is best that Aimée should

say it over again herself. He thinks, no doubt, that I am influencing her."

"You should influence her," said Mr. Meredith. "You should see that there is an end to such folly at once."

"I *have* influenced her," said Fanny, very truthfully. "But for me, she would not have sent him away last night. And so you were positive that it was *me* whom you saw!" she went on, with absolutely mirthful eyes. "It is true, Aimée is as tall as I am; but then she is so slight, and so unformed—"

"How could I tell that at night?" said Mr. Meredith. "And how could I think of her? She always seemed to me a mere child. I confess that I thought only of you—and a most miserable night I spent in consequence," he added, feelingly.

"I am not at all sorry," said Miss Berrien, with uncompromising decision. "You had no right to think such a thing for a moment, after all that I have said to you. It was shameful! It shows that you have no trust in me—no real regard and respect for me. If I did what was right, now that I have proved how you

misjudged me, I should never speak to you again!"

"Oh, you would not be so cruel as that, I hope!" said the now humbled and alarmed suitor. "Because, after all, I was hardly to blame—I forgot all about your cousin's existence; and you know you have never *promised* anything, so I had no right to feel certain of you."

"You will never have the right if you can not trust me better than this," said Fanny, perceiving her advantage and pressing it ruthlessly.

It was not difficult to foresee the state of subjection to which Mr. Meredith would soon be reduced in order to make amends for the mistake into which he had been betrayed. Miss Berrien was determined upon two things: first, to keep him well engaged until she was sure that Lennox Kyrle had left the house, and, secondly, to revenge herself for the fright she had suffered; but despite her self-command, her nerves were in a state of considerable tension, and it is to be feared that it was rather a bad quarter of an hour which he was called upon to endure.

Not so bad, however, as that of poor Aimée, who was sent forth to again encounter and overcome the ill-used Mr. Kyrle. She found him standing at the hall door—a slender, handsome young man, whose refined face and brilliant, eager eyes presented a type as widely different from Mr. Meredith as it is possible to conceive. He turned quickly at the sound of her footstep, and Aimée felt as if the glance which fell on her pierced to her trembling soul. But there was nothing which she desired or had need to conceal, so she came forward, the movement of her slight, shrinking figure reminding him of the night before, and her dark eyes full of an unconscious appeal.

"I am sent," she said, in a low, hesitating voice, "to tell you—" And then she paused. What had she been sent to tell him?

"To tell me that Miss Berrien is engaged and declines to see me, I presume," said Mr. Kyrle, quietly, coming to her assistance. "I anticipated some such message. But may I ask why Miss Berrien has developed this sudden fear of meeting me? She certainly can not think that I will proceed to extremities

and carry her off by force. It is possible that she might have feared something of the kind last night, but *now*—"

"Oh, pray don't say such things here!" interrupted Aimée, finding her tongue in sheer dismay, as she glanced in apprehension from the staircase, down which her aunt might descend at any moment, to the parlor door out of which Mr. Meredith might issue. "Fanny told me to take you into this room, where we can speak quietly," she went on quickly. "Will you come for a moment?"

She opened, as she spoke, a door which led into a small sitting-room. It was Mrs. Shreve's private domain, but Fanny (who was her prime favorite) had obtained permission to use it in emergencies like the present, and when directing Aimée to go there she knew that Mrs. Shreve was at this time out of the house.

Mr. Kyrle hesitated an instant, then followed Aimée into the room, and when she had closed the door looked at her a little curiously.

"Why do you let your cousin put such a

duty as this upon you?" he asked, abruptly. "Why do you not decline to aid her selfishness and duplicity? Then she would be forced to come and face the truth herself."

"I do not think it would do her any good," replied Aimée, simply, "and I am sure it would not do you any at all. I have come because she asked me—that is all. I do not approve of the way she is acting"—with a grave shake of the head—"but I could not refuse to help her, for she is in a difficulty."

"I can very well imagine what it is," said Mr. Kyrle, grimly, "and I assure you that I have no desire to add to the embarrassment of her position. I am simply here to end in a definite manner what I have been foolish enough to regard as a tie between us. I believe I told you last night that I would make no effort to see her, and had I followed my inclination I should have adhered to that resolve. But a little reflection showed me that to leave our relations as she desired them to be left was impossible on my part. It is necessary"—he spoke with emphasis, drawing together his straight, black brows in an un-

conscious frown—"that she shall clearly understand that by her own act she has ended all between us. I have a right to demand that she will see me in order to hear this."

"Of course you have a right," agreed Aimée, thinking the while how different this was to the pleadings Fanny had anticipated; "but just now it is *impossible* for her to see you, so the best thing you can do is to go away. I promise you that I will tell Fanny whatever you wish."

"I have no doubt of that," he said. "Any one who would undertake for another what you have already undertaken in this matter can be trusted, I am sure, to make a truthful report. But there are some things which should be said face to face; so I must beg you again to request Miss Berrien to see me. I will not detain her more than a few minutes."

"But—" said Aimée, and then she paused, asking herself what she could possibly urge that would be likely to influence this very determined young man, and save Fanny from the Nemesis that seemed about to overtake

her. The absolute self-forgetfulness of her wistful gaze, as she stood with her hands clasped tightly together, struck Kyrle in the midst of his own preoccupation; but before he could speak she went on hurriedly: "If it were possible, Fanny would see you, I am sure. But she is placed in a very trying position just now, and she can not help herself—she *can not* see you. If you would only believe this and go away, perhaps some other time—"

"I believe it because you say it," answered Kyrle, moved by a sudden impulse of compassion for the distress on her face, "and for your sake I will go. But there will be no other time, so far as any attempt of mine to see Miss Berrien is concerned. Her refusal to receive me, coming after her conduct of last night, makes it impossible that I shall ever again approach her. May I ask you to be my embassador, as you have been hers, and tell her that I disregarded her wishes and attempted to see her, not because I desired in the least to change her resolution, but because I wished to bring matters between us to a

positive and definite conclusion. I did not want to leave any loophole for misunderstanding. Be kind enough to make this clear."

"I will," said Aimée, in feverish haste to be rid of him. "I promise you that I will make it perfectly clear. And shall I tell her that you are going away at once?"

"At once," he replied, with decision. "She need fear no further annoyance of any kind from me; and you need not fear being sent again on such an errand as that of last night. At least there is no possibility of your being sent to *me*, and I strongly advise you to decline to serve Miss Berrien in that manner again."

"She is not likely to ask me to serve her in that manner again," said Aimée. "But though it was not pleasant, I would rather do that than—some other things," she added, with a keen recollection of the service she had lately been called upon to render.

"It was simply unpardonable to have sent you on such an errand," said the young man, his indignation growing with his interest in the childlike creature. "What if you had

been seen and recognized! She should have known, if you did not, the grave risk you ran."

Aimée was too loyal to acknowledge that she had been seen, so she only repeated her former statement: "It would not have mattered. I am of no importance at all; nobody thinks of me."

"Apparently not," said Lennox Kyrle dryly. To his credit it may be said that nothing had so completely disillusioned him with regard to Fanny Berrien, not even her perfidy toward himself, as her selfishness toward her young cousin. To take advantage of a child's ignorance and generosity, to put her into a position that might have seriously compromised her, seemed to him an act so unworthy, that he could not entertain a shade of respect for the woman who was capable of it. "But it does not follow that, because nobody thinks of you, nobody *should* think of you," he went on with energy. "You should think of yourself, and not allow your cousin to make use of you in this manner."

"I am quite willing to be made use of, if I

am not asked to do anything wrong," said Aimée, simply; "and it seemed to me that it would have been worse in Fanny to go away with you, than to send me to tell you that she could not go."

"Perhaps so," said he, unable to resist smiling, "and I am quite willing to acknowledge that it was better she did not keep her appointment—better to break faith than keep it with an unwilling heart; but she might have had courage enough to own the truth herself."

"She was afraid of you," said Aimée, candidly. "And then there was the danger of her being seen. If Mr. Meredith had seen *her*—"

She stopped short—confusion and alarm painted on her face—conscious how far her tongue had betrayed her. There was an instant's hope that Lennox Kyrle would not observe the name which had slipped out, but the next moment proved that hope vain.

"It would have been awkward, certainly, if Mr.—Meredith, did you say?—had seen her," he replied quietly. "But how if he had seen *you?* Perhaps he did!" (with a sudden

flash of comprehension). "I remember now that after you left, as I stood watching to see you safely home, I noticed a man on the sea wall who seemed watching you also. If that is the case, he shall understand the truth. I will go to him myself."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Aimée, in an agony of apprehension. "You must not think of such a thing! You would only do harm to Fanny, and no good to me—for how does it matter what Mr. Meredith thinks of me? I am of no importance."

"You have said that several times," answered Kyrle, "but I beg to differ with you. Because you are a child now, it does not follow that you will always be a child, and the time must come when you will understand that it is of great importance that you should not be suspected of making midnight appointments like that of last night. It was in a measure my fault that you were sent on such an errand, so I am bound in honor to let the truth be known."

"And ruin Fanny's prospects?" said Aimée, who felt that the situation was critical, and that

something must be done at once to restrain the impetuosity of this young man. It was characteristic of her that the first idea which occurred to her was of an appeal to his generosity. "You can do that," she went on, fixing him with her dark, earnest eyes, "but it will seem like a revenge—and a very mean one. You will injure Fanny, you will make a scandal that will almost kill my aunt, and you will do me no good—for nobody knows anything now except Mr. Meredith, and he cares nothing about me. But if you go to him, everybody will soon know something, though not the truth."

Lennox did not answer immediately. He simply stared at her, so much was he struck by her decision and good sense. It was true what she said. By interfering he could do no good, and it would certainly look like a revenge—"and a very mean one." Aimée had instinctively struck the right key. While a man of different nature might have stretched out eager hands for any form of revenge, this man drew back from the chance put into his hand as if from a viper.

"You are right," he said, after a moment. "I should place myself in a false position by interfering, and perhaps do more harm than good. But, all the same, it is a shame that the truth should not be known, and a greater shame that your cousin should trade upon your generosity. However, you will say that is no affair of mine. It is true. And since I can do no good to any one except by going away, I will go without loss of time. Only one thing more: besides my message, will you deliver this into your cousin's hand? I have no longer the right to retain it—nor the inclination."

He drew from his pocket as he spoke, and gave to her, a small golden locket which contained, Aimée afterward discovered, a picture of Fanny and a curl of her sunny hair. As she received it, a voice suddenly sounded in the hall which brought dismay to her soul, for it was the voice of Mrs. Shreve, and this is what Mrs. Shreve was saying:

"Come in, if you please, sir. I will send and let Mrs. Berrien and Miss Vincent know that you are here."

"Miss Vincent!" said Aimée, in a frightened whisper. "That is *me*—and nobody ever comes to see me! Who can it be?"

Meanwhile Mrs. Shreve's voice went on amiably: "You wish to see them in private? Then step into my sitting-room, where you will be altogether private, and— Oh! *Miss Aimée!*"

It was a tableau for a moment—the open door in which stood Mrs. Shreve, bonneted and shawled; Aimée a picture of confusion, with the locket in her hand; and Lennox Kyrle, tall, straight, and handsome, standing before her. The scene, to all appearances, told a story evident to the dullest comprehension; and it was not alone to Mrs. Shreve's eyes that it was revealed. Behind her was a young man whose glance over her shoulder took it all in.

The tableau lasted only a moment; for Aimée, seeing the face over Mrs. Shreve's shoulder, uttered an exclamation of surprise, in which pleasure evidently bore no part. "Percy," she cried, "is it you?"

"Yes, it is I," answered the young man,

coming forward as Mrs. Shreve moved aside. He cast a look of angry suspicion at Kyrle, then, taking Aimée's hand—which she made no movement to offer—bent and kissed her cheek: "You did not expect to see me," he said.

"No; why should I?" she answered, blushing so furiously that it was evident his salute was not a customary matter. "Why have you come?"

"To see you—and to take you home," he answered, with another suspicious glance at Kyrle.

This the latter returned with one of coldly careless scrutiny, and then held out his hand to Aimée.

"I will not intrude longer," he said. "You will wish me *bon voyage?* I am leaving St. Augustine immediately."

"Oh, yes," answered Aimée, eagerly. "I wish you *bon voyage* with all my heart, and I shall not forget—"

She paused abruptly—remembering that she must not say, "I shall not forget to give your message to Fanny"—and of course the

sudden pause and blush which accompanied it could bear but one interpretation to the looker-on.

"I shall not forget your kindness," said Kyrle, conscious of the false position in which she was placed, and angry at his inability to right it. But, fearing to do harm and complicate matters further by any attempt in that direction, he felt that the best thing he could do was to go. So with a parting bow he left the room, hearing, as he went, an angry voice saying:

"Who is that man, Aimée?—and what is the meaning of this?"

VII.

Aimée looked straightly and bravely into the questioner's face.

"That," she said, quietly, "is Mr. Kyrle. You do not know him, so we need not discuss his visit. Tell me why you have come for me. Is mamma ill?"

"No," answered the young man, whose

sufficiently good-looking countenance was very much disfigured by the frown with which he was regarding her; "she is very well, but it is necessary that you should go home at once. And I did not come a day too soon, if *this* is how you are engaged."

"What do you mean by *this?*" asked Aimée, indignantly—Mrs. Shreve having withdrawn in search of Mrs. Berrien. "I do not know why you should speak to me in such a manner because you find a visitor—"

"A visitor!" interrupted the other, angrily. "Do your visitors usually leave such cards as that?"

He pointed, as he spoke, to the locket which Aimée had forgotten that she still held in her hand. She now thrust it hastily into her pocket; but, though her face crimsoned, she still regarded him with dauntless eyes.

"It is no affair of yours," she said. "I am not called upon to give you any explanation. I am here under Aunt Alice's care."

"An admirable care it seems to be," said he, sarcastically. "It is fortunate that I have come to take you out of her hands."

"I can not understand why any one should have thought it necessary to send you," said Aimée. "It is a new thing that what I do should be considered of importance by any one."

Then there was a moment's silence. It was impossible for Mr. Percy Joscelyn—which was this young gentleman's name—to deny that it was indeed a very new thing for Aimée's actions to be of importance in the opinion of her family. Her repeated assertion that it did not matter to any one what she did was founded on most undeniable fact, or had been a short time before. And if all was changed now, if her actions had suddenly become of very great importance, it was for a reason difficult to state when thus confronted with what yesterday had been the truth.

Fortunately, a diversion occurred at this point which relieved him from the inconvenience of answering her remark. The door opened and Mrs. Berrien entered.

"Why, Percy, how do you do?" she said. "This is a great surprise."

"Yes," said young Joscelyn, as they shook

hands, "I suppose so. But I have come for Aimée."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Berrien, looking as much surprised as Aimée herself. "What is the matter? Is her mother ill?"

"No, my stepmother is in very good health," was the reply. "But it is necessary that Aimée should go home. There has been—ahem!—a great change in her circumstances."

"In her circumstances!" repeated Mrs. Berrien, while Aimée's eyes grew wide and startled. "What has happened?"

"She has inherited a fortune," said the young man in tones of such solemnity as the announcement warranted.

"*Aimée*—inherited a fortune!" cried Mrs. Berrien. If he had announced that Aimée had suddenly been transformed into a royal princess it could hardly have seemed to her more incredible. "You are surely mistaken."

Percy Joscelyn smiled with an air of superior knowledge. "In such matters there is not much room for mistake," he said. "You have heard, I presume, of Henry Dunstan?"

"My brother's half-brother—my stepmother's son by another marriage? Of course. But he went to South America and died years ago."

"On the contrary, he died only last month; and, having lost his wife and only child, he made a will just before he died leaving his fortune to the children of his half-brother, Edward Vincent, of whom, as you know, Aimée is the only child."

"My dear Aimée, this is indeed a change for you!" exclaimed Mrs. Berrien, turning and embracing the startled girl with honest warmth. "I am as pleased as if a fortune had been left to myself. Now I need feel no more anxiety about your future."

"I shall never forget who was the only person who ever did feel any," said Aimée, clinging to her as though some danger threatened.

Mrs. Berrien smiled. She knew that it was true; that she had indeed been the only person who had ever given a thought to the future of the fatherless girl, and she was not sorry that Aimée should recognize the fact.

It was the reward for a good action, which she deserved, because no such reward had seemed even remotely possible when the action was performed.

Naturally, however, this was not very pleasant for the representative of the Joscelyns to hear; and, being a young man with a considerable drop of venom in his nature, Mr. Percy Joscelyn felt impelled to reply to the implied charge by bringing a countercharge.

"I am sorry that Aimée imagines you to be the only person who felt any anxiety for her future," he said, stiffly. "But if I may judge by the position in which I found her when I arrived, it was at least not a troublesome anxiety in the present."

Mrs. Berrien looked at him with haughty surprise. "May I inquire what you mean?" she asked. "You have found her in exactly the position she would have occupied as my daughter."

"Indeed!" said he, with what Aimée inwardly called "Percy's disagreeable smile." "You are, of course, the best judge of that. But I found her with a young man, evidently

exchanging love-tokens. If that is a liberty you would allow your daughter, I can only say I am sure my stepmother would prefer an anxiety that would take another form."

Regarding him for a moment as if she thought he had taken leave of his senses, Mrs. Berrien then turned to Aimée:

"What is the meaning of this?" she asked, "What is he talking about? There is nothing that I can imagine more improbable than that you were 'with a young man exchanging love-tokens.'"

"I was not—O Aunt Alice, I was not!" cried poor Aimée, divided between indignant wrath and the desire to burst into tears. "Percy did find a—young man here; but he was only a—visitor."

"But when have you taken to receiving such visitors?" said Mrs. Berrien with amazement. "And I was not even aware that you knew any young men— O Aimée, this is indeed a shock. I could not have believed it. I should have said that you were one of the last girls in the world to be guilty of such conduct."

"I have not been guilty of any conduct to which you need object, Aunt Alice," said Aimée earnestly. "I would not deceive you—indeed, I would not."

"Then who was the visitor Percy found with you?" asked Mrs. Berrien.

Aimée looked at her piteously without speaking—for did not loyalty to Fanny seal her lips? Had not Fanny been as anxious to keep the knowledge of Lennox Kyrle's visit from her mother as from Mr. Meredith? The girl was so absorbed in this thought that she forgot how useless it was to attempt to conceal a name which had been revealed to Percy Joscelyn, and which he now hastened to supply.

"Aimée seems to have forgotten the name of her visitor," he said, "but she informed me that it was Kyrle."

"Kyrle!" repeated Mrs. Berrien. The truth flashed on her. She gave a searching glance at Aimée, and read the whole story in the girl's beseeching eyes. She remembered then that Mrs. Shreve had told her that Mr. Meredith was in the parlor with Fanny.

What could be plainer than that Fanny had sent Aimée to ward off anything so undesirable as the appearance of her old lover? But with this knowledge came also the consciousness of an unpleasant dilemma. To tell the truth for Aimée's justification would be to put Fanny in the power of Percy Joscelyn, who would take pleasure, Mrs. Berrien felt sure, in injuring her by letting the truth be known. Could she do this? Was such a sacrifice demanded of her? The woman whose heart was set upon her daughter's brilliant marriage, yet who was of an upright nature and had honestly done her best for this orphan girl, knew an instant of sharp struggle—and then Aimée spoke:

"Yes, it was Mr. Kyrle, Aunt Alice," she said. "I hesitated to tell you, because I know you do not like him. He was here only a few minutes, and he is going away immediately." She paused for an instant, then added, "I do not expect Percy to trust me, but *you* will, I am sure."

"Yes, my dear," said Mrs. Berrien, with a sense of mingled shame and relief. "I should

have to forget all that I have ever known of you if I could not trust you. I am glad to hear that Mr. Kyrle is going away. But Percy"—looking at that young man—"may be sure that the visit to you had no such significance as he was quick to imagine."

"I have not much imagination," said Mr. Joscelyn, "but I am quick to trust the evidence of my eyes; and if Aimée will kindly produce a locket which she put in her pocket a minute ago, you may change your opinion with regard to the significance of Mr. Kyrle's visit."

"I can trust Aimée," repeated Mrs. Berrien, trembling lest Aimée should produce the demanded locket, "and I will not attempt to force her confidence. It is not to-day for the first time that her actions have become of importance to me," she added with much stateliness of manner, "and therefore I do not need to be schooled in my duty toward her. Now we will dismiss the subject. When do you wish to take her away?"

"The sooner the better, I think," replied the young man with considerable spitefulness

of emphasis. "There is, of course, much to be done."

"But Aimée is too young to do anything with regard to business," said Mrs. Berrien.

"Her mother is anxious to see her," said Mr. Joscelyn—a statement which made Mrs. Berrien smile, and produced in Aimée a sense of deepening amazement—"and it is necessary that she should begin at once to prepare for the position she will occupy."

"What will that be?" asked Mrs. Berrien, a little dryly. "Have you learned the amount of her fortune?"

"Not precisely; but the letters received from Rio speak of it as very large."

"And so you are transformed into a South American heiress, my dear little Aimée?" said Mrs. Berrien, with a smile, putting her arm caressingly around the girl, who answered, between a laugh and a sob:

"I do not know what to think of myself under such a transformation."

VIII.

If Aimée did not know what to think of herself under the transformation of her changed fortunes, those around her knew very well what to think. Never again would any act of hers be reckoned of no importance by the world, which, whatever shrines it may desert, is always faithful to that of the golden calf; and when Fanny Berrien learned that it was a great heiress whom she had sent to keep her rendezvous on the sea wall, and whose name she had, in the minds of two people at least, linked with that of Lennox Kyrle, she stood aghast at the realization.

"For, of course, since Aimée is to be such an important person, I have done her a great injustice," she confessed to her mother. "I should never have sent her if I had not thought her too insignificant for it to matter; and the same consideration made me say what I did to Mr. Meredith. How could it harm Aimée, I thought! and now—"

A dramatic gesture concluded the sen-

tence, but did not lighten the cloud on Mrs. Berrien's brow. Indeed, Fanny said afterward that she had never seen her mother so angry as on this occasion.

"If the change of fortune had not occurred, and Aimée had remained as insignificant as you thought her, I should say that you were guilty of shameful and inexcusable conduct," said Mrs. Berrien. "To send her—a child under my care—on an errand that might have compromised her even more than it has done; and then to shield yourself by placing her in a false position—I could not have believed you capable of it! And the question now is, what am I to do? I can not leave Aimée under the imputation of having been ready to elope with Lennox Kyrle."

"I see no particular harm in the imputation," said Fanny, "especially since Mr. Meredith is the only person who knows of it, and I will see that *he* holds his tongue."

"You forget that Percy Joscelyn found Mr. Kyrle with Aimée."

"And what then? He has only his suspicions of some love affair between them—and

why should not Aimée be supposed to have a love affair? *I* had half a dozen at her age."

"Fanny, I am ashamed of you!" said her mother, severely. "Is this a proper spirit in which to look at a matter in which you have been gravely and deeply at fault? Have you no generosity, that you are willing to let your young cousin bear the consequences of your frivolity?"

"It is *her* generosity that makes her willing to bear them," said Fanny. "But if you insist, mamma, I can set the matter straight, so far as she is concerned, by telling Mr. Meredith the truth. Of course, he will never speak to me again, and I don't clearly see how that will do any good to Aimée. But still, if you insist—"

"I suppose I ought to insist," said Mrs. Berrien, in a low tone. "It is a shame if I do not. And yet—you have put me as well as Aimée in a position for which I shall never forgive you!" turning sharply to her daughter—"you have made it almost impossible for me to say what must be done. I should like to see you married to Mr. Mere-

dith, but I shall always feel that such a marriage is bought too dearly if it can only be bought by putting your young cousin in a position which may throw a cloud over the brilliant prospects of her life."

"Mamma, if you will excuse me, that is all nonsense!" said Fanny. "How can it possibly throw a cloud over Aimée's prospects —which I heartily wish were mine!—that one or two or three people believe her to have had a youthful love affair with Lennox Kyrle? Lennox is a very nice person—though you would never believe it—and he may be a famous man some day."

"It is you who are talking nonsense," said Mrs. Berrien, curtly. "It is not necessary to discuss Mr. Kyrle. Fortunately, he is a gentleman—there is that much to be said for him; otherwise we will put him aside. You say that it can not injure Aimée's prospects to be supposed by two or three people to have had a youthful love affair with him. In the first place, what is known to two or three people will certainly be known to many more; and, in the second place, it *is* a great injury to any

girl, in the opinion of people whose opinions are worth consideration, to have had any such affair, much less to be supposed to have been on the verge of an elopement. As I have said, it would be bad enough if Aimée had remained insignificant; but *now*, with her prospects, I can not endure it!"

"Then *my* prospects are at an end, and I might as well bury myself at once!" cried Fanny, who began to fear that her mother was seriously in earnest. "It is not only that I shall lose Mr. Meredith—for of course there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it—but I shall be hopelessly compromised, and I can not even fall back upon Lennox Kyrle, for he has gone off in a rage, swearing that he is done with me forever. So you might as well make up your mind, mamma, that I shall be left on your hands."

"Fanny, you distract me!" said her mother. "Do you propose that I shall let this thing go on, and suffer Aimée, who does not know what she is doing, to start in life with this story fastened upon her?"

"Aimée knows perfectly well what she is

doing," said Fanny, "and if she does not mind why should you? As for her changed position, when people have money they can do exactly what they please, and the world never dares to find fault. That is my experience. But here she comes herself. Ask her what she wishes. I promise to abide by her decision."

It was indeed Aimée, who entered like an angel of peace. She never looked more child-like or gentle, yet her simplicity now as ever was the simplicity of good sense, and as she came forward she glanced appealingly from the anxious daughter to the distracted mother.

"I was in the next room; I could not help hearing, Aunt Alice," she said. "I have come to thank you for thinking so much of me, and to beg you to let things be as they are."

"My dear child, it is generous of you to desire it," said Mrs. Berrien, "but I do not feel that I have a right to accept such a sacrifice. I must think of your future."

"Have you not always thought of me?" said the girl, coming forward and in her ear-

nestness kneeling down by her aunt's chair. "*You* know, and *I* know, that nobody else has thought of me at all. And will you not let me repay you in the least for your kindness and your thought? It is such a little thing that I want you to let me do. Fanny is right. What difference does it make whether two or three people believe that I was going to elope with Mr. Kyrle? It can not hurt *me;* but if it were known of *her* it would hurt her very much. I saw Mr. Meredith this morning, and I am certain that he would never forgive her if he learned the truth now. It is too late. You can make things worse, Aunt Alice, but you can not make them any better now."

Mrs. Berrien gave a little gasp. It was true, all that the simple, quiet voice said. Things might easily be made worse, but it was too late to make them better. She perceived this, and was not sorry to perceive it, even while despising herself for being convinced. But what could she do, with Fanny's imploring eyes on one side, and on the other Aimée's resolution?

"I ought not to yield," she said. "Whether

things were made better or worse, the truth should be told."

"Oh, no; if the truth would do harm, instead of good, why should you tell it *now?*" said Aimée, with guileless casuistry. "I wanted Fanny to tell Mr. Meredith at first, but she would not, and now it is too late. You must let things be, dear Aunt Alice. Promise me that you will let them be."

The insistent voice and eyes carried their point. Mrs. Berrien hesitated a moment longer, then meekly yielded.

"I am wrong, I know I am wrong," she said, "but I can not withstand you both. Aimée, I shall never forgive myself if this throws any shadow of trouble on your life. Remember, if it ever does, and you wish the truth known, call upon me and I will tell it."

Aimée shook her head, smiling.

"I am not afraid that the occasion will ever come," she said. "I am too glad to be able to do something for you, who have done so much for me."

IX.

But Mrs. Berrien was not the only person who felt concern about the very unjust suspicion that might be cast upon Aimée. Lennox Kyrle, as he went out, with Percy Joscelyn's angry question ringing in his ears, said to himself, indignantly, that it was shameful that such a misconception should be allowed for a moment to exist, and that, if Fanny had neither the courage nor sense of justice sufficient to induce her to speak, it was his plain duty to do so. Only one consideration deterred him, and this was the consideration Aimée had so artfully brought to bear, that to reveal the truth would on his part appear to be the revenge of a jilted man.

"My lips are sealed," he thought, wrathfully, "and Fanny Berrien knows it, so she allows this child, who is too young and ignorant to understand what she is doing, to bear the consequences and the odium of her conduct. It is infamous, and I will not submit to it! Something must be done."

But to declare in the warmth of righteous indignation that something must be done, and to decide what that something should be, were unfortunately very different things. Mr. Kyrle felt himself impotent in the face of the double force of feminine resolution arrayed against him, and yet he was determined that matters should not be left as they were. The more he thought of it, the more he was revolted by Fanny Berrien's selfishness and duplicity, and the more eager he became that she should be made to bear the burden of her own misdoing. But how was this to be accomplished? He walked away from Mrs. Shreve's door after asking himself the question, and finding no answer short of that method which would be open to the suspicion of being dictated by revenge. One thing, however, he determined—that he would not leave St. Augustine at once, as he had declared his intention of doing. That Fanny Berrien very much desired his departure, was in his present mood an incentive to remain. Yes, he would stay for a day at least, and see if circumstances might not make it possible for him to set matters in their true light.

At the hotel where he had taken up his quarters—for this was before the era of palatial hostelries in the quaint old Spanish town—he saw Mr. Meredith and Percy Joscelyn, and might have been amused by the glances, not of love, which both men cast upon him, but for the fact that he clearly understood the misconception in the mind of each; and to be held guilty of tempting a girl hardly out of childhood to elopement, was as outraging to his pride as to his sense of integrity. It is to be regretted that he did not encounter Miss Berrien at this period, for that lively and easy-going young lady would assuredly have heard some truths, clothed in caustic language, which might have proved of benefit to her. But instead of Miss Berrien, it was Aimée whom he encountered again, in a manner most unexpected to both. One of the girl's greatest pleasures during her stay in St. Augustine had been to spend much of her time in an orange grove on the outskirts of the town, to which she had a right of entrance, as it belonged to Mrs. Shreve's son. Other people also went there occasionally to walk under the pictur-

esque trees and pluck the golden fruit that gleamed out of the glossy foliage; but Aimée would take books or work with her, and spend hours alone in what seemed to her an enchanted world of soft sunshine, balmy air, and sweet odors. It was therefore a place that she felt she could not leave St. Augustine without seeing again — the more especially that, after the events of the morning and the tremendous change that seemed impending over her, she needed a little time for quiet reflection. And quiet reflection in the house with her aunt and Fanny was an impossible thing.

So it came to pass that, in the last hour of a perfect afternoon, Lennox Kyrle, who had been taking a walk while chewing the cud of unpleasant reflections, was attracted by the appearance of a figure coming along the road on which he was tramping. His sight was remarkably keen, and after an instant, although the person was still distant, he had no doubt who it was.

"It is that little girl!" he said to himself. "I call this good luck, for really the only thing

I can do, as far as I perceive, is to make another appeal to her to tell the truth. Yet to go back to that house to see her was impossible. So it is surely a fortunate chance that brings her here—and alone, too!"

The next moment he feared that he had congratulated himself too soon. The figure paused an instant and then disappeared. Had she also recognized him, and desired to avoid meeting him? He thought it likely, but determined grimly that she should not succeed. Since to reach Fanny and scorch her with reproaches was impossible, his next best chance was to work upon Aimée, and this he vowed to himself that he would not be prevented from doing. If she had gone into some house, he would remain on the road until nightfall in order to waylay her on her return home; but if she had perhaps taken another road— The suspicion of this made him quicken his steps, so that a few minutes after Aimée's disappearance he reached the spot where he had seen her last. No house was in sight, but it was evident that she had entered a gate which led into an orange grove, the beautiful alleys of

which he had admired as he passed it on his way out an hour before. Indeed, as he gazed eagerly and quickly down the green vistas filled with sunset light he perceived what he sought—the graceful form pacing slowly along one of the overarched ways.

To decide and to act was more a synonymous thing with Lennox Kyrle than with most men. He did not give a thought to any question of intrusion or trespass. He opened the gate and went in, striding quickly down the path in which he perceived the slender, girlish figure. He was not conscious at the moment of bestowing much attention upon the scene around him, but its aspect came back to him so vividly afterward, that the sensitive plate which we call memory must have retained it with unusual fidelity. Long afterward he could see distinctly the floods of level sunlight slanting through the tree-trunks and turning the very air to amber, the wealth of glistening evergreen foliage, the boughs laden with what seemed the golden apples of classic fable, the indefinable charm of the Southern atmosphere, and above all the delicate, child-

like presence like a vision of youth flitting down the sunlit vista.

But if there was a satisfaction to him in thus finding an opportunity to deliver the thoughts which had turned so hotly within him all day, there was not the least satisfaction for poor Aimée, when, hearing a quick tread advancing behind her, she turned to confront the last person in the world whom she had the least desire to see. She stood still, clasping her hands instinctively together as she uttered a low cry of dismay.

"O Mr. Kyrle!" she gasped. "I hoped—I thought you had gone away."

Little as Kyrle was in a mood for smiling, he could not but smile at this ingenuous address. "I am sorry to disappoint you," he said, "and to break my word—for I promised to go, didn't I? But there are reasons that seemed to make it imperative for me to remain a little longer. And, as it chanced just now, while I was taking a walk, I saw you enter this place, and I hoped you would pardon me if I followed you."

"But why?" inquired Aimée, far too dis-

turbed to be polite. "Why should you want to see me, and why—oh, *why* haven't you gone away? Fanny would be dreadfully worried if she knew you were still here."

"What Miss Berrien might think does not trouble me in the least," he replied, quietly; "but I am sorry to annoy you. I really did not think, however, that merely seeing me would annoy you so much. Why should it? I have no intention of harming any one."

"Without intention you may do great harm," she replied, quickly. "And I can not understand why you should stay, when you promised—"

"I will tell you why," he said as she paused. "But is there no place where we can sit down for a few minutes? I will not detain you long."

She pointed to a bench not far off, a favorite seat of her own, and one to which she had been on her way when he overtook her. "We can sit down there," she said, with manifest reluctance, "but I do not see the necessity—"

"Never mind seeing it," he said. "Simply oblige me—if I must put the matter on that basis. I am sure you will admit that I have been badly enough treated to merit a little consideration."

"You have certainly been *very* badly treated," said Aimée, her eyes softening with sympathy at the memory of his wrongs. "I hope you don't think I forget it, or that I can ever cease to blame Fanny; but—but making things worse can not make them better. And it seems to me that you can only make them worse by staying here."

"As far as Miss Berrien is concerned," he said, as they walked toward the bench and seated themselves, "I assure you that I have not the least desire to make them either worse or better. It seems strange—does it not?"—he broke off abruptly, "that this time yesterday I was looking at the setting sun filled with thoughts of her, and longings for the moment that would bring us together, and that now there is not a woman whom I know in the world that I would not sooner entertain the thought of marrying. It is a great change

to be wrought in twenty-four hours. And do you know what has chiefly wrought it?"

"Her conduct, I suppose," answered Aimée. "It was bad enough to have wrought anything; and yet," she added, reflectively, "I don't really believe that Fanny herself thinks it was very bad. She is—light, you know."

"Yes," assented Kyrle, dryly, "very light. However, what she thinks is a matter of no importance. And it is not her conduct to me that has chiefly wrought the change of which I speak, but her conduct to *you*."

"To me?" said Aimée, looking up at him with a startled expression. "Oh, pray, don't think of that. You don't understand—Fanny never meant to do me any harm. I was perfectly willing to go last night, and it was not her fault that Mr. Meredith, instead of going home, as he should have done, stayed on the sea wall and saw me."

"Pardon me," said Kyrle, "but I think it was distinctly her fault. To have sent you on such an errand was in itself absolutely inexcusable; but afterward to let it be supposed that you went of your own accord—that you were

the person about to elope—there is no language strong enough to characterize such cowardly duplicity. You wonder why I am still here? It is because I determined to see you, and say to you that if you do not tell the truth, I will. This shameful deception, this trading on the generosity of a child, shall not continue."

Aimée looked up at him. When had she seen any one so moved with indignation and generous wrath? She thought again that this man was far from the ductile wax Fanny Berrien imagined him to be; but, righteous as his resentment and anger were, it would not do to allow him to act upon them. Yet how could she hope to influence or bend the fiery resolution that breathed in his look and words?

"It is too late," she said at last. "I have promised, and I have made others promise, that things shall be left as they are, and nothing would induce me to speak. Fanny is selfish and thoughtless, but she never intended deception. It all—came about because Mr. Meredith frightened her, and she was afraid to tell the truth. Fanny is a little of a coward,

you know. She is very sorry—really sorry, I assure you; but if she told Mr. Meredith now, he would never forgive her."

"And so you advise her to continue to deceive a man whose affection for her should entitle him at least to fair dealing?" said Kyrle, bitterly. "Is a man, then, never certain of truth from a woman? In Fanny Berrien I am not surprised. But your eyes look as if you ought to know what honor and honesty are."

The eyes of which he spoke filled with tears. No other reproach could have cut Aimée so deeply. Twenty-four hours earlier she would have said that honor and honesty were the forces that would always rule her life; and now—she could not deny that from this high standard she had ignominiously fallen. And how was it possible to explain what compelling impulse of gratitude had made it seem a duty to violate the strongest instincts implanted in her nature? She looked at Kyrle with the overbrimming crystal drops almost ready to fall, and he, meeting the pained humility of that look, felt as if he had struck a helpless child.

"I suppose it was wrong to have helped Fanny when it came to a question of deception," she said, "but you do not know how unkind and ungrateful it would have seemed of me to refuse. It looked such a little thing—just to say that it was I whom Mr. Meredith saw last night. And *that* was true. Oh, yes" (quickly), "I know that it is as bad to imply a falsehood as to tell it. But—but what could I do? I owe so much to my aunt!"

"I have no right to hold you to account," said Kyrle. "Only let me ask if you think it possible to owe any debt of gratitude great enough to demand a sacrifice of integrity in payment?"

"I don't know," she answered, simply. "I am sorry if I have done anything very wrong, but I will tell you why I felt compelled to make almost any sacrifice to shield Fanny." She hesitated a moment. It seemed a difficult subject to approach, and Kyrle was about to beg her not to distress herself in order to give him an explanation to which he had no claim, when she went on hastily: "You see, I am only partly an orphan. My father is dead, but

my mother is living and has married again. She is very much under the influence of Major Joscelyn—that is my stepfather—and I have always felt, though perhaps I was wrong, that she does not care much about me. The Joscelyns have never liked me; so I was very unhappy at home, when Aunt Alice came and took me away. I can not tell you how different life was to me when I went to live with her and Fanny. They have both been so kind and affectionate, they have done so much for me, of whom no one else ever thought at all, that there is not anything—not *anything*," repeated the passionate young voice, "that I would not do for them. And I can not regret what I have done, though I am sorry it seems to you so wrong."

"It is chiefly wrong to yourself," said Kyrle. "I wish I could make you see this as I do. It is not less than a crime against your future to allow people to suppose—for what one person knows, many people are pretty certain to know—that you were not only engaged in a love affair, but on the point of eloping with me last night."

A deep blush, beautiful in its tint but painful in its intensity, spread over her face. She looked away from him and her lip trembled. He saw that some instinct which had been dormant before was waking in her, and making her understand the outrage which such a misconception would do her childlike youth, and he pressed his advantage remorselessly.

"You can not possibly comprehend what injury the story might do your life at some of its most critical moments," he said; "but your aunt, Mrs. Berrien, will comprehend, and to her I shall go. I am deeply enough concerned in the matter to have a right to demand that the truth shall be told."

"If you go to my aunt," said Aimée, turning upon him quickly, "you can distress her very much, but you can not tell her anything which she does not know. All that you have said about possible injury to me *she* has said and I had much trouble in persuading her to let things be as they are. You must not think any wrong of her. She knew nothing until Percy Joscelyn, my stepbrother—who came in, you remember, this morning—charged her

with not having taken proper care of me, because he found you in Mrs. Shreve's sitting-room with me. It was like his effrontery to dare to speak so to her!" the girl interpolated, with flashing eyes. "Yesterday no Joscelyn of them all would have cared what became of me; only Aunt Alice cared. But to-day, because it seems they have learned that I am rich, Percy ventures to insult her!"

Nothing could have surprised Kyrle more than this sudden flash of indignant anger in one who had seemed to him gentle to a fault. But he was a man of quick perceptions, and all the intense affectionateness, the passionate gratitude and loyalty of the girl's nature, were revealed to him in that moment of emotion. He was deeply touched and interested, for in this instant he understood that it was no vulgar love of intrigue, no lack of rectitude, no obtuseness toward the finest things of life, that had made Aimée play her part in Fanny Berrien's commonplace comedy of flirtation. Instead of comedy it had become tragedy to the girl, with her keen sense of honor, her high standard of loyalty, and her delicate instinct

of the claim which love and trust given create in a generous mind. But there were motives, deep-rooted in her nature, strong enough to make her do violence to all these things and stand firm as Fanny's shield. Kyrle almost forgot the point he was himself intent upon in his interest in the springs of feeling and action thus laid bare before him.

"And so," Aimée went on, "when Aunt Alice heard that you had been there she knew, of course, what it meant, and she insisted on hearing everything. Then she said the truth must be told; that Mr. Meredith must know why I went out last night; that now I am rich —why are things so much more important when people happen to be rich?—it would not do for any one to imagine that I had been going to elope. But Fanny said that Mr. Meredith would never forgive her if he heard the truth now, and I begged Aunt Alice on my knees to let me do this little thing in return for all she has done for me. So at last she yielded, and I was very glad, and—and it can not be that you will go to her and make more trouble. Why should you concern your-

self about me?" she demanded, turning to him with another but somewhat lesser flash in her eyes. "What is it to you if I do this?"

"Well, for one thing," replied Kyrle, "I am myself somewhat concerned in it, for I assure you that I am not the kind of man to endeavor to persuade a girl of your age to elope, and naturally the imputation of having done so is not very agreeable to me."

"Oh!" said Aimée, with a look of contrition, "I never thought of that. I forgot that it could not be pleasant for you to be suspected of such a thing. You must forgive me for being so selfish; and yet"—she paused an instant and gazed at him with a passion of entreaty in her eyes, which at that moment he thought were at once the most expressive and the most beautiful he had ever seen—"and yet," she went on in a low, thrilling tone, "if you could only be generous and kind enough to allow it to be believed of you by the only person who knows anything about it, I, for one, should be grateful to you as long as I live!"

But for the gravity of her appeal Kyrle

could have laughed at the absurdity of the situation; and yet her simplicity, her utter lack of thought for herself, touched him again beyond measure. "My dear child," he said—for in truth he did not recall her name—"I feel as if I might do almost anything, simply because you wished it; but you do not know what you ask in this matter. You tell me that you have become rich, which means important in the world, and yet you desire to darken the fair promise of your youth with such a story as this would speedily become in the mouth of gossip. It is impossible—it would be a shame! I can not consent to it."

"But what can you do?" she asked, dropping appeal and regarding him now with nothing less than defiance in her dark eyes. "Is it not true that a gentleman is bound never to betray a woman's secret? How, then, can you betray Fanny's? As for me, I will never speak."

There was no doubt of that. A hundred oaths could not have expressed resolution more firmly, more immovably, than those simple words. And what could Kyrle reply?

He knew well that he could not betray Miss Berrien's secret, and it was the consciousness of this that had made him so determined to influence Aimée. But now he was forced to own himself completely baffled. Aimée's strength of will was greater than any force he could bring to bear against it, and there was nothing left but to accept the situation created for him as best he might.

"You are right," he said at last. "A gentleman is bound in honor to keep a woman's secret; so Miss Berrien is safe from me. If she chooses to shelter herself behind you, and you choose to allow her to do so, I have no power to prevent it. But I am sorry that I have failed completely to make you understand what a great mistake you are committing. To save an unprincipled flirt from the consequences of her double-dealing, you are laying a cloud on your own life at its beginning."

"I care nothing about that," said the girl, with honest indifference. "I am only sorry that Mr. Meredith should be deceived, and that you have to bear (though only in his

opinion) that imputation of which you spoke a few minutes ago. But I am going away to-morrow; and since it seems I am of some importance now" (a sigh), "I suppose the Joscelyns will keep me always; so he and everybody else will soon forget all about this."

"I assure you that I shall never forget it," said Kyrle. "It is an episode calculated to remain in a man's memory. The heartless, selfish woman who has made a fool of me, I shall indeed have no trouble in forgetting; but the part you have played, mistaken as it is, I shall long remember. I only wish you had displayed such qualities as you have proved yourself to possess, in a better cause. Given a good cause, you would be a heroine. And now"—he rose as he spoke—"this time it *is* good-by. Since I have failed completely in the end for which I remained here, I shall return at once to the yacht. Will you shake hands with me and tell me your name? One should surely know as much as that of a young lady with whom he is supposed to have nearly eloped."

But Aimée could not jest on such a sub-

ject. She gravely told him her name and put out her hand. For long he carried with him a picture of the slender presence, the delicate face looking wistfully into his, as if to make sure that this time he could be relied upon to depart, and the golden sunset glory seen through the orange boughs behind her.

"Good-by," he said, gently. "I am sorry I have not moved you. Some day you will see that I am right, and I only hope you will not then too much regret that you did not follow my advice."

He pressed her hand warmly, released it, and walked away, down the green vista of the grove.

PART II.

I.

It is an April day, and Venice is lying under a brilliant sun, which brings out all the beryl sheen of its translucent waterways, the gleam of its marvelous domes, the Byzantine color that still clings to the front of its palaces, and all the life of its picturesque and varied humanity. It is the last which specially appeals to the interest of a man who has strolled from the Piazza San Marco into the Piazzetta, and watches the animated movement along the Riva de' Schiavoni, that meeting-place of Italy and the Orient, with eyes that take in every variety of the types passing before him. And when they grow tired of water-carriers and gondoliers, of soldiers and sailors, of Italians, Greeks, Austrians, and Orientals, they have but to look beyond on the fairest scene in the world—the wide, green plain of shining water,

as the Grand Canal opens into the lagoon, the isle of San Giorgio with its cluster of picturesque buildings, and far to seaward the Armenian Convent of San Lazare.

But the picture grows too dazzling after a while, and the observer, turning, walks toward the palace of the Doges, entered under the Saracenic arches into its great court, and ascending the Giant's Stairway passed into those gorgeous saloons where the sumptuous life of old Venice still glows on the walls in that Venetian art which in glory of coloring excels every other school. The usual number of tourists, with open guide-books, were scattered through the apartments, filling even the dread chamber of the Council of Ten with their light chatter; but the newcomer avoided them, lingered only in comparatively empty rooms, and presently wandered into the Hall of the Great Council, whence he passed out of an empty window to a balcony, where he found himself on a level with the top of the column which bears the winged lion, and overlooking from this higher elevation the same wide, beautiful picture of sea and sky, of glittering

domes and sun-tinted campanili, which he had lately seen from below.

On a seat conveniently placed in a corner of the balcony he sat down, and with his back against the stone wall of the Ducal Palace, with the famous lion smiling familiarly upon him, and with the scene of all the past glory and triumphs of Venice before his eyes, he fell easily into that waking dream which Venice above all places has power to produce. For where else is the setting of the past so perfectly preserved? From the gorgeous frescoes of Tintoretto and Paul Veronese, one steps forth to look on the unchanged scene—palaces, columns, quays, luminous sea, and dazzling sky—of the great events they represent, and to ask one's self if the stately pageants will not soon come forth to meet the victorious galleys laden with the spoils of the East, or to accompany the Doge when he goes forth in state to wed the Adriatic?

Into some such dream this man had fallen, when his pleasant solitude suffered an interruption. Through the open window a figure suddenly stepped, and advancing to the balus-

trade stood before him outlined against the horizon of sea and sky. For a moment he was inclined to regard with impatience this new object, obtruded into the foreground of the picture he had been contemplating with so much satisfaction; then it dawned upon him that, so far from marring, it rather added a new and charming element to this picture. For it was the figure of a young girl, tall and graceful, with an indescribable beauty in the carriage of the small, shapely head and the lines of the neck and shoulders. Her attitude, too, was full of unconscious grace, as she stood gazing seaward; and since her back was turned toward him, he could admire this grace at his leisure, together with the picturesque drapery of her dress, which was made of some fabric as soft and clinging in quality as it was harmonious in color.

But presently she turned her face toward the great lion of St. Mark, and presented to his view what he instantly decided to be the loveliest profile he had ever seen—a profile as clearly cut as that of a head on an antique cameo, but with a peculiarly delicate grace of its own, and

with coloring as exquisite as the tints of a flower. She was smiling as she looked at the lion—who stonily regarded her from his pedestal—and she made such a delightful picture in her youth and beauty, that the man behind her held his breath, fearing lest some chance movement should betray his presence and cause her to disappear.

But, instead of this, she was presently joined by another figure, that of a young man, who stepped through the window and walked up to her side with an air of easy familiarity.

"By Jove!" said the newcomer, "I don't wonder that you come out here for relief from those miles of pictures! Their effect is positively stupefying."

"To *you*, perhaps, it may be," said the young lady, in a very sweet voice, with a slightly mocking accent. "But it was not because *I* felt stupefied that I came out, but because the greater picture tempted me. When one has Venice before one's eyes, one hardly cares to look at paintings."

"That is exactly my opinion," said the young man, "so let us go down and get into

a gondola and float about. That is the principal thing to do, besides lounging in the piazza."

"Then suppose you go and lounge in the piazza," said the young lady. "I am very well satisfied where I am," and as she spoke she turned again toward the railing, with the air of one who did not mean to stir.

"Oh, I am very well satisfied to stay here —with you," said her companion, leaning beside her.

At this point it occurred to the unobserved listener behind that the time had come for him to retire. Solitude was charming, and charming also was the contemplation of a single graceful figure in the foreground of a noble picture; but a conventional pair of young people engaged in a conventional flirtation was more than he could endure. With a sense of disgust and vexation he rose, and entered again the Hall of Council.

Over this magnificent apartment various groups were scattered, some studying the frescoes of battles and triumphs, others following

the frieze of Doges' portraits, and pausing before the vacant panel across which is thrown a black curtain and on which is painted the name of Marino Faliero, and the short sentence, "*Decapitati pro criminibus*," while others were occupied with Tintoretto's vast *Paradiso*. Among the latter was a pretty, fashionably dressed young woman, who, seated on a chair before the immense picture, had transferred her attention from it to the costumes of a pair of English girls, whose dresses were as ill-fitting as their complexions were blooming, and who appeared to be studying the great composition in detail, unconscious of the critical glances of the animated fashion-plate behind them.

This little scene attracted the notice of the idler from the balcony, and as he advanced, drawn rather by amusement than by any special interest on his own part in the *Paradiso*, the lady of the chair turned her eyeglass upon him. A moment later she had dropped it and risen to her feet, exclaiming:

"What, Lennox—Mr. Kyrle!"

Lennox Kyrle—for it was he—started and

looked at her for an instant; then he held out his hand, saying, quietly:

"This is a very unexpected pleasure, Mrs. Meredith."

Fanny Meredith turned from white to red, and red to white again. His composure seemed to rebuke her agitation and that slip of the tongue—"Lennox." Moreover, she could not forget that this was the first time they had met since parting as lovers. But she recovered herself quickly, and, glancing up as she gave him her hand, said, a little reproachfully:

"I knew you at once, though you have changed, but you were not sure of me."

"Yet you have *not* changed," said he, smiling and wondering—so quick is thought!—as he looked into her upturned face, where he had found the charm which once enslaved him. She had not changed, he was quite right about that; but where was there inspiration for any of the rapture and agony of passion in this blooming, piquant, commonplace countenance? As he held the hand which he had once so eagerly coveted, he thanked

Heaven for that old disappointment, while he said, "But I could not expect to meet you here."

"As easily as I could expect to meet you," she answered, "though it is true I heard that you had gone to Egypt as a war correspondent. But the war has been over for some time."

"For something like half a year," he replied; "but I have been up the Nile, and, had it not been for a sudden summons calling me home, I might be emulating Stanley in equatorial Africa now."

"I should think you would rather be here," said Mrs. Meredith, with a little shudder. "We have lately come, and I am delighted with Venice."

"Most people are," said Lennox; "and by 'we' you mean, I presume, Mr. Meredith and yourself?"

"And the Joscelyns. We joined them in Paris. You know the Joscelyns? No? Well, at least"—with a sudden laugh and blush—"you remember Aimée?"

"Aimée!" he repeated, in a puzzled tone.

Then suddenly there flashed upon him the memory of the old sea wall of St. Augustine, of the tide murmuring at his feet, of the stars shining overhead, and of a sweet, frightened voice saying, "I am sent to tell you that Fanny can not come." The name, which he had forgotten, brought the scene back like a picture, and with it also another scene—an orange grove at sunset, its alleys filled with golden light, its glistening foliage meeting like an arcade above, and a pair of dark eyes gazing half-beseechingly, half-defiantly into his, while the same sweet voice said, "As for me, I will never speak!" Remember her! How could he ever forget the delicate, childlike creature, with her unbending loyalty? His eyes, which time had not rendered less brilliant and keen, gave a flash of recollection as he turned them on Mrs. Meredith, saying, "You mean the young cousin whom you sent—"

"Yes," she interrupted, looking around with a quick glance. "Pray, be more cautious. If it were suspected, there would be trouble even yet. It is a great bore

to have a jealous husband! And you know you are supposed to have been Aimée's lover."

Mr. Kyrle drew his brows together, and lifted a head which was not without natural haughtiness a little higher. He thought that the bad taste of this speech was only equaled by its impertinence.

"I am aware," he said, stiffly, "of the deception which you induced your cousin to assist you in practicing at the time of which you speak; but I hardly thought it possible that even you could have allowed such an impression to remain until now."

"You are as flattering as ever, I perceive," said Fanny, coolly. "'Even you'—that means, I suppose, that you consider me bad enough for anything, and yet are a little surprised that I have been bad enough for this! But, you see, if it was a matter of necessity at the time, it has been equally a matter of necessity ever since. And it did Aimée no harm; whereas to have told the truth, then or later, would have done *me* great harm."

"I remember that she described herself as

of no importance," said Kyrle, "and it seems that you fully shared the opinion."

"Yes," answered Fanny, calmly, "that was what we both thought, she and I, when I sent her on that unlucky errand. I shall never forgive Mr. Meredith for not going home and to bed like a Christian that night! But, as it turned out, she was really a person of much importance. She inherited a great South American fortune, and she is now an heiress and beauty of the first rank."

"And yet," cried Kyrle, with the old indignation rushing over him, "you have suffered her to rest under—"

"The aspersion of having been on the point of eloping with you," said Fanny, with a subdued, wicked laugh. "Yes, it was a necessity of the situation, and I will say for Aimée that she is the most generous creature I ever knew. I really can not see why you should look so indignant. Pray, do you think it such a horrible thing to have been on the point of eloping with you?"

"I think," he answered, haughtily, "that it is a shameful injustice to allow a young girl

to rest under the imputation of having been about to elope with any one when she is altogether innocent of it."

"We went over all that and settled it at the time," said Mrs. Meredith, impatiently, "and it is much too late to unsettle it now. It is ancient history — dead, buried, forgotten. Besides, no one knows anything about it except Mr. Meredith; and there is surely not much to harm Aimée in one person's knowledge. Percy Joscelyn suspects something — you may remember that he found you with Aimée on that awfully unlucky day — but he does not *know* anything. He will, however, look upon you as having been her lover, and the whole Joscelyn clan will be thrown into consternation by your appearance. They watch the poor child, and every man who approaches her, like so many dragons. How amusing"—with another irrepressible laugh—"it is that you should have turned up just now!"

"At the cost of depriving you of some amusement," he said, coldly, "I shall not renew my acquaintance with your cousin — if ac-

quaintance it could be called. The last thing I am capable of is of annoying one who has already been the victim of such an injustice."

"But why should you annoy her?" inquired Fanny—whom time had evidently not robbed of any of her volatile qualities—opening her eyes. "And you don't know, really, what you will lose. She is charming! Every one admires her immensely."

"I shall not have the opportunity of doing so," replied Kyrle, more stiffly than ever, for he said to himself that this woman was insufferable. "I am leaving Venice almost immediately, and since I may not have the pleasure of seeing you again, I shall therefore bid you adieu—"

"Not just yet," said Fanny, with a note of malicious triumph in her voice. "Here is an old friend to whom you must speak first.—Aimée, my dear, let me recall Mr. Kyrle to your recollection."

II.

KYRLE turned, full of anger, which changed in a moment by some miraculous process into satisfaction, for who should stand before him, with wondering eyes and faintly flushing cheeks, but the lovely lady of the balcony!

And she was lovelier even than he had imagined, with a face in which all fine issues of thought and feeling seemed to meet. She looked surprised, yet the gentle, curving lips smiled as it were irresistibly, while she said, with the composure of a woman of the world, "I recollect Mr. Kyrle perfectly, though I should not have known him."

"Nor I you," Lennox answered, bowing deeply. "But I have never forgotten you."

It did not occur to him until after the words were spoken what a lover-like sound they might have to any one under that false impression which he had just resented. But when he lifted his head it was to meet a pair of eyes which at once enlightened him with regard to the interpretation of which they

were susceptible. These eyes belonged to the young man whom he had already seen on the balcony, and whom Mrs. Meredith now introduced as Mr. Joscelyn.

Percy Joscelyn had not forgotten the man whom he found with Aimée on the momentous occasion when he went to announce the great change in her fortunes, and he instantly identified this bronzed stranger as that man, even before hearing the name which he had taken care to remember. It was therefore natural enough that his eyes should express suspicion and dislike when Lennox met them.

But this immediate proof of Fanny's assertion, that he would be regarded as "Aimée's former lover," did not irritate Kyrle as might have been expected. On the contrary, he was conscious of a sense of amusement which he would not have believed possible a moment earlier. It was the appearance of Joscelyn which wrought this change. A few minutes before he had, unconsciously to himself, envied this man; now *he* was transformed into an object if not of envy, at least of apprehension to the latter. It was impossible not to feel that

the situation had its elements of interest. He looked at the beautiful girl standing before him, a smile still on her lips, but her gentle, high-bred composure otherwise unchanged, and felt that, after all, the suspicion of having been her lover was one which he could cheerfully support.

Aimée, on her part, regarding him with the deep, soft eyes he remembered well, was thinking of the sea wall, the star-lighted tide, and the young lover who had taken his disappointment with such fiery disdain. There rose before her, too, a memory of the orange grove at sunset, and the generous anger which had burned there for her rather than for himself. She knew well that most men in his place would have given scant thought at such a time to any one so insignificant as she had been, and therefore, remembering his deep concern for the false position in which she was placed, she had held Lennox Kyrle in grateful remembrance during all the years since their one day of brief acquaintance.

Yet it was characteristic of the woman, as it had been characteristic of the girl, to forget

herself for others; and so at this moment she was thinking less of herself and her own singular connection with that past story, than of the two before her, who had been lovers once and now were strangers. She was wondering how they felt on meeting again face to face, and how much or how little the memory of the past thrilled them. Fanny she knew too well to expect any depth of feeling from her; but how was it with Lennox Kyrle?

Meanwhile, amid all these memories, it was necessary that some one should sustain conversation with the usual commonplaces; and of this Mrs. Meredith was fortunately fully capable.

"I was never more surprised than when I looked up and saw Mr. Kyrle a few minutes ago," she said to Aimée. "And yet there was really no reason to be surprised at all."

"Not in these days, when everybody goes everywhere," said Lennox, "and the acquaintance one parted with in Europe yesterday, one meets to-morrow in China. Especially a wanderer like myself may be met anywhere."

"You are a wanderer, then?" said Aimée.

"Yes," he answered. "I am a person with whom you are intimately acquainted—'our special correspondent,' and therefore my duties take me to many places."

"They have brought you to a very delightful place now," said she.

"My own inclination has brought me here," he replied, and as he uttered the words he saw a quick flash of suspicion in Percy Joscelyn's eyes again.

"Have you been here long?" asked Fanny. "*We* came about a week ago; and we are doing our sight-seeing so leisurely that we have hardly as yet seen anything at all, except what can be perceived from a gondola."

"I arrived only a day or two ago from Alexandria," answered Kyrle, "but I am inclined to think that, for a time, what one perceives from a gondola—that is, Venice herself—may be best of all."

"It is," said Aimée. Upon which the young man beside her, speaking for the first time, observed:

"It might be, if Venice were better preserved; but one grows tired of looking at so

much decay. In fact, in my opinion, we have been here quite long enough."

"Then, my dear Percy," said Mrs. Meredith, coolly, "I advise you to take your departure for any place that you like better, for we, who have come to Venice for a month, mean to stay."

It was not a very amiable glance which Mr. Joscelyn bestowed upon the speaker, but he did not answer save by this glance. He turned instead to Aimée, and said:

"We seem to have lost the rest of our party. Shall we not go and look for them?"

Before Aimée could reply to this proposal, the entrance of a party of four made reply unnecessary, for it was at once apparent that these were the missing persons whom it was proposed to seek. Yet they had the appearance themselves of seeking, rather than of needing to be sought, for as they entered they all looked around, and perceiving the group before the *Paradiso*, eagerly advanced toward it.

The foremost of these newcomers was a tall, elaborately dressed young lady—young, at

least by courtesy—whose commonplace prettiness was spoiled by an exceedingly artificial appearance and manner. With her were a faded, languid, elderly woman, possessing much natural elegance and traces of great beauty; a man of about sixty, carefully got up with padding and hair-dye to look not more than forty; and a rotund, florid, genial man of thirty-five or thereabouts. As these advanced the young lady spoke:

"I thought we should never find you! Where have you been hiding yourselves?"

"We have been hiding ourselves where you see us," replied Mrs. Meredith. "When I lose people, I always make a rule of quietly sitting down and letting them find *me*, instead of running about trying to find *them*. So I have been sitting here for half an hour in a conspicuous position; and, as a reward, I have been found—not only by you, but by an old acquaintance who has most unexpectedly appeared.—Mrs. Joscelyn, let me present Mr. Kyrle."

Mr. Kyrle bowed to the elderly lady, who at once put up her eyeglass to examine him,

with an alacrity which indicated that his name was not unknown to her. He was then presented to Major Joscelyn, to Miss Joscelyn and to Mr. Meredith; and he was aware of being regarded with more or less active suspicion by all of them except Miss Joscelyn, who smiled as graciously as women of her order generally do upon an apparently eligible man.

"I—ah—hum—have heard of Mr. Kyrle," observed Major Joscelyn, in a tone which intimated that he had heard no good of Mr. Kyrle. Then he fixed a pair of prominent eyes upon the young man and inquired if he had been long in Venice.

"Only a few days," Lennox answered, carelessly.

"Ah—a few days! And you are leaving soon?"

"That depends altogether upon circumstances," replied Kyrle, who in fact intended to leave in a day or two, but had no desire to gratify Major Joscelyn by telling him so; for already he felt an *animus* of dislike against these people, not only because of their attitude

toward himself (for that, being the result of misconception, only amused him), but from their appearance and manner. "They are self-seeking and insincere," was his judgment, as his glance passed rapidly from face to face; and then, turning to the lovely, candid countenance of Aimée, he thought, "She is like a dove among hawks."

Major Joscelyn giving no other reply to his last remark than a disapproving "Hem!" Miss Joscelyn took up the conversation, and remarked that Mr. Kyrle probably found Venice attractive.

"Very attractive—especially within the last half hour," he replied, with deliberate malice.

The Jocelyns looked at each other, while Mr. Meredith glanced at his wife, and the latter said, quickly:

"Of course, it has become more attractive within the last half hour. What is pleasanter than meeting old friends unexpectedly? Mr. Kyrle is on his way to America from Egypt," she added in general explanation, "and it is the merest chance that we should have met him."

No one remarked that it was a fortunate chance. On the contrary, silence appeared to indicate an altogether different opinion. After a moment, Major Joscelyn observed that they had probably seen enough of the Palace of the Doges for one morning, and that it was time to think of returning to the hotel.

There was a general movement, and it is likely that Lennox would have taken a final farewell of the party there and then, had not Aimée turned to him with a smile sweet enough to atone for any degree of incivility on the part of the others, saying, "And have you, too, had enough of the Ducal Palace?"

"For the present," he answered; and availing himself of what seemed a tacit permission, he walked by her side as the party passed from the great hall, along corridors and down staircases to the court below.

Those few minutes completed the impression which she had already made upon him; and an impression in which her beauty played a small part in comparison with the gracious simplicity of her manner and the charm of her voice and glance. There was much in this

voice and glance to remind him of the girl who had carried Fanny Berrien's message to him, who had so timidly offered him her sympathy and compassion, and who had sat by his side under the orange boughs. Yet, save in the dark sweetness of the eyes and the gentle cadence of the tones, there was surely little in common between that frightened child and this stately young lady.

If he had only known it, however, there was the great thing in common that she was offering him now, the same sympathy that she had offered then. She was too young, and of too limited experience, to have learned the power of change which lies in time, and it seemed to her that he must inevitably be deeply moved by such an unexpected meeting with the woman he had once loved; and her gentle kindness was the involuntary form in which she expressed this feeling. But naturally no one could be aware of this—not even Kyrle himself. He thought that she simply meant to atone for the incivility of her friends; the latter cast alarmed glances upon one another; and Fanny Meredith was no nearer

the truth than any one else, in saying to herself: "Aimée is certainly the best creature in the world! She is throwing herself into the breach to prevent Tom from being jealous."

When they reached the Piazza there was a slight pause of the party, and Kyrle felt that he was expected to take leave. "Since I have been so fortunate this morning, I hope to be fortunate again," he said to Aimée in clearly audible tones. "I shall trust to have the pleasure of meeting you again."

"Oh, no doubt," answered she, readily. "People who know each other can not possibly fail to meet in Venice. But will you not come to see us? We are at the Grand Hotel.—Fanny, surely you mean to ask Mr. Kyrle to come to see you?"

"Mr. Kyrle knows that I shall be delighted to see him," replied Mrs. Meredith, "but really we are at home so seldom that it hardly seems worth while to ask him to come. As you have just observed, people *must* meet when they are in Venice; and their best chance to meet is away from home, rather than at home. Nevertheless, I hope you will

take the chance of finding us in," said she, to Kyrle.

"I shall prefer to take the chance of finding you elsewhere, since you are more likely to be abroad," replied he.

"And elsewhere is so much pleasanter than at home," interposed Miss Joscelyn. "The Belle Arti, now—have you been to the Belle Arti, Mr. Kyrle?"

Mr. Kyrle replied that he had not. "I have not been sight-seeing since my arrival," he said, "but only lounging."

"Oh, but you must certainly see the Belle Arti," said the young lady with animation. "You can have no idea of the Venetian school of art until you have studied it there."

"I have no doubt Mr. Kyrle is aware of that, Lydia," said Fanny Meredith, dryly; "but since we have exhaustively done the Belle Arti—at least I hope we are done with it—he is not likely to meet us there, and it was of meeting us that he was speaking."

"It was certainly of meeting you that I was thinking," said Lennox.

"Hum—ah!" said the major, addressing his party, "shall we move on?"

Kyrle watched them with a smile as they moved away across the sunshiny square. He was saying to himself that it would go hard with him if he did not see again the beautiful eyes he had been looking into, and hear the sweet voice which had just bidden him such a kindly adieu.

III.

It was no later than the evening of the same day before he met the party again. He was idly sauntering around the arcades of the Piazza, brilliant with lights and filled with the sound of many tongues, when he heard a voice say, "Oh, there is Mr. Kyrle!" and turning, he encountered Fanny Meredith's bright glance. She was sitting at one of the tables near the door of a *café*, with Aimée, Mr. Meredith, and young Joscelyn, taking coffee and ices, and as Lennox paused she went on, gayly:

"Come and join us. You look lonely, and

we are stupid. We know each other so well that each knows exactly what the other will say; so, like *Punch's* married lovers during the honeymoon, we are ready to welcome a friend, or even an enemy, so he prove entertaining."

"But how if one should not prove entertaining?" asked Kyrle, who needed no second bidding to take a vacant chair by her side.

"Then you must have made very poor use of your opportunities," said she, "and changed very much besides—must he not, Aimée?"

This was audacious, Kyrle thought; but glancing at Aimée, he was reassured by her smile.

"When I knew Mr. Kyrle, I was not very well able to judge of his powers of entertainment," she said, "though I have no doubt they were great."

"On the contrary, they have always been of a very limited order," said Kyrle. "I am immensely flattered, however, by Mrs. Meredith's kind recollection, and only regret my inability to justify it."

"You have at least improved in modesty," said Mrs. Meredith.

"A man who has been in the desert six months should be modest when he returns to civilization," he answered. "Perhaps it is because I have been in the desert," he added, looking around, "that it seems to me one hardly needs better entertainment than this scene."

"It is very bright and interesting for a while," said Mr. Meredith; "but fancy coming here every evening of your life, as these Venetians do! One would think that it would grow monotonous in time."

"To a stranger it would certainly grow monotonous in a short time," said Kyrle; "but those who have all their interests, social or otherwise, here, and who have a strong attachment to this which has been the frame of their life from its beginning, and the frame of the life of Venice through all her history, are not likely to grow weary of it."

"I think," said Aimée, "that even a stranger might require some time to grow weary of it—such a picture in such a frame!"

"That would depend entirely upon the stranger," said Lennox, regarding her with a smile.

And indeed she was herself a picture worth regarding as she sat in the light of the brilliant lamps; her fair, delicate face shadowed by a large hat covered with curling plumes, and her liquid eyes full of pleasure as she looked over the gay life of the Piazza, or turned to the solemn front of the great cathedral lifting its domes and minarets against a sky of hyacinth blue.

"It is a very pretty scene," said Percy Joscelyn, superciliously, "but I think it quite possible to grow tired of it. There is so much sameness. Now, the boulevards—"

"Percy is a very good American; his idea of heaven is a Paris boulevard," said Fanny Meredith. "I am fond of the boulevards myself, but, for a change, I call this delightful."

Lennox agreed with her. He did not ask himself why it was so delightful, but he felt a sense of thorough and complete satisfaction, as he sat, joining in the light, idle conver-

sation, commenting on the motley throng which ebbed and flowed around them, and drinking a cup of black coffee as if it were nectar.

Presently Mr. Meredith suggested a return to their hotel, but this was at once negatived by his lively wife. "The moon is well up by this time," she said. "Let us go out in a gondola. It will be charming to float about for an hour or so."

"Good Heaven!" said the husband, "have you not been floating about enough during the course of the day? It seems to me that we hardly exist out of a gondola, unless we are in a church or a picture gallery."

"Well, then, you need not come," said she, laughing; "but I know Aimée would like to go—would you not, Aimée?"

"I am always ready for a gondola," was the smiling reply.

"Percy will go. He is always ready for a gondola too," pursued Fanny. Then she turned to Kyrle. "Will you join us?" she asked.

"I shall be delighted," he replied, trying

not to make the commonplace words too eager.

"Then we are a nice *partie carrée*, and we will go at once," said she, rising and taking a shawl from the back of her chair.

No one inquired how far Mr. Meredith approved of the arrangement. He was left smoking a cigar in front of the *café*, while the *partie carrée* proceeded to the Riva in search of a gondola.

As was to be expected, Percy took possession of Aimée, while Lennox found himself walking by the side of his old love. Neither of them spoke for a minute or two; then Fanny turned and glanced at him with a mischievous smile.

"Time has its recompenses as well as its revenges occasionally," she said. "Are you meditating on that?"

He looked at her and was forced to return her smile. "You are as full of *diablerie* as ever," he said, "but if you have no sense of compassion, have you not any compunction?"

"Compassion!—compunction! What fine, large words! But why should I have either?"

she asked. "You do not need compassion, I am sure; and as for compunction—you could not expect me to be sorry *now?*"

"Certainly not," he answered, with alacrity. "Regret for what has resulted so well would be entirely out of place—for you, that is. For me, however—"

"Are you trying to insinuate that you have any regret?" said she, with a laugh. "Ah, that pretense is shallow! I have had such long experience that I can tell, the moment that I look into a man's eyes, whether he feels the smallest bit of sentiment; and you —as far as I am concerned—you have not enough to put on the point of a pin! Do you think it strange of me to talk in this way?"—He did think so, and his face no doubt betrayed as much. "But I have a reason. I want you to understand that I am not under any foolish delusion about you, as some women would be. I am anxious that you should trust me, and let me be your friend."

"Pray believe that I trust you entirely," said Lennox—who did not trust her at all.

"But a friend—I am much honored; yet I do not know that I have special need of a friend at present."

"You will never have greater need," said she, emphatically, "for you have fallen in love with Aimée, and, unless I am your friend, the Joscelyns will not suffer you even to speak to her."

"I can well believe that," said he, involuntarily. Then he paused and laughed. "But have I fallen in love with the young lady whose name is so suggestive of that emotion?" he asked.

"You are the person to answer the question," replied Fanny; "but I should say there was no doubt of it. I have been watching you for the last hour, and the entire scheme has matured beautifully in my mind."

He looked at her again—curious, interested, uncertain what to make of her. The pretty, piquant face he had once known so well, was full of animation and amusement as she turned it toward him, meeting his puzzled glance.

"You are ungrateful," she said; "you do

not trust me; and yet I am anxious to do you a great service."

"Granting that I need a service," said he, "forgive me if I ask—why should *you* wish to do it?"

"Now, that is more than ungrateful," said she. "It is giving me credit for no fine feeling at all. Though I jest, do you think I do not remember how badly I treated you once? It is all over now—and no doubt you are grateful enough that it is so. But still the fact remains. I did treat you badly, and I should like to be able to feel that I had made some amend for it. So much for you. Now for Aimée"—her voice changed slightly. "Well, I owe a great deal to Aimée, and I would do a great deal for her. When it was a question of serving me, she did not think of herself at all; and, though I may be frivolous and shallow, I do not forget this."

"She certainly did not think of herself at all," Kyrle agreed—looking at the graceful figure moving in front of them, and remembering the sea wall of St. Augustine.

"I always said I would repay her if I

could," Fanny went on, "and I do not think I can repay her better than by rescuing her from the hands that have possession of her now, and saving her from marrying Percy Joscelyn."

The last shot struck home. Kyrle was himself astonished at the sense of consternation with which he started. "Is that thought of?" he asked.

"*They* think of it," Fanny replied. "They are ready to move heaven and earth to accomplish it; but"—the tone of gleeful malice which he had heard before came into her voice—"I think we may defeat them, you and I, if you will say the word."

"What word is it that you wish me to say?" he asked.

She looked up into his face again with bright eyes. "What word can it be," she replied, "except the simple assertion that you wish to marry Aimée?"

Fortunately for Kyrle, he had no opportunity to answer at the moment. They had by this time reached the Riva, and Joscelyn, turning, said, "Here is a gondola."

A few minutes later they were afloat on

the broad expanse of moonlight-flooded water, with Venice—marvelous, mystical, beautiful—lying around them. The cabin had been removed from the gondola, and the ladies took the two cushioned seats, while the young men threw themselves down at their feet. And so they glided out into the silver night.

Surely it was an hour worth living for! The brilliant lights from the quays streamed over the water and were reflected in the still depths below, like an enchanted city; but this illumination paled before the splendor of the moonlight that reigned supreme, making all things visible, yet veiling every defect of time, for other defects in Venice there are none. Under this magic light the "glorious city of the sea" has all her ancient glory still; one sees no longer the decay which has fallen over her palaces, but only the loveliness which made her the wonder of the world. Past islands, palaces, and domed churches they glided with that smooth, noiseless movement which is half the charm of a gondola, and were soon on the broad lagoon, where the booming of the Adriatic surf upon the Lido

came to their ears like distant thunder—the only sound which broke the silence around them.

The others talked, but Aimée said little. She leaned back on the broad, easy seat, and the white radiance falling over her seemed to intensify all that was spiritual in her beauty, until she looked rather like a fair dream of a woman than a creature of flesh and blood. Lennox pulled his hat low over his eyes in order that he might watch her unobserved. His blood was still bounding from that suggestion of Fanny Meredith's before they entered the boat. It had taken away his breath, yet he felt as if in some intangible way it had drawn him nearer to this exquisite creature. It seemed to make that a possibility of which he had not ventured to dream; and as he watched the lovely face he was ready to utter with emphasis the word desired. Here on the shining water, with the moon beloved of lovers in all ages looking down, he felt his youth reawakening with a sense of power and resolve. He did not think of difficulties or doubts; he only yielded himself to the strange, sweet en-

chantment which had so unexpectedly overwhelmed him.

Presently Fanny looked at him curiously, "Why have you grown so silent?" she asked. "You and Aimée are not the most lively companions one might choose."

"Lively!" repeated Lennox. "If you wanted liveliness, you should have remained on the Piazza. This is not the place for it."

"It seems to me that all places are the better for it," said she; "but perhaps that is because I am a Philistine. However, since you don't think this a place for liveliness, suppose you sing something. It is certainly a place for music, and we have left all the musicians behind."

They had indeed left those gondolas full of singers, which haunt the Grand Canal and hover around the hotels of Venice, far behind, and were floating in the silence of the lustrous night near San Lazare. Lennox hesitated and looked at Aimée, who turned her glance on him.

"Do you sing?" she asked.

"Sing?" repeated Fanny. "He used to

sing divinely! "I suppose he has not forgotten that in the desert."

"Oh, no," said Lennox, with a laugh. "I have floated on the Nile and sung to myself many a night."

"Sing to us now, then, will you not?" said Aimée.

There was no insistence in her tone, only a courteous request; but he complied immediately, as he would no doubt have complied had she asked him to take a plunge into the sea. Nor did he require more than an instant to decide what he would sing. As he watched her uplifted face with the moonbeams falling on it, he had been thinking of a song of Heine's, and the music—Schumann's music—was in his throat, as it were; so he began at once:

"The lotus flower feareth
The splendor of the sun;
Bowing her head and dreaming,
She waits till the day is done.

"The moon he is her lover;
He wakes her with silvery light;
To him unveils she, smiling,
Her flower-face pure and white.

"She gazeth on high in silence,
Doth bloom and gleam and glow,
Exhaling and weeping and trembling
For love and love's deep woe."

He sang "divinely," as Fanny had said, for Nature had given him a voice of the finest order—a pure, melodious tenor—and, though it had never received much training, there was something in it to-night which took the place of training and made it unnecessary—a thrill of emotion, a depth of expression, which art can never teach. When the full, soft notes sank over the last cadence, Fanny cried out with admiration, and even Mr. Joscelyn condescended to say, "Bravo!"

But Aimée did not speak at once, and it was only when Lennox looked into her "flower-face pure and white," that she said, "You have a great gift, Mr. Kyrle, and a great power to bestow pleasure."

The words were kind, but what was there in the voice that seemed to Kyrle's ear like a touch of frost? The exaltation of his mood sank under it, and he suddenly seemed in his own eyes to wear very much the aspect of a

fool. What had he been doing? Singing out his heart to unsympathetic ears, led away by the magic of the night and the fairness of a face which, after all, was the face of a stranger, or, worse yet, of one who knew him only as the lover of Fanny Meredith. What had possessed him to take leave of his senses in this manner? Was this what was likely to happen to a man when he came out of the desert and found himself in unaccustomed contact with civilization again? Did the first lovely face on which he looked lead his senses astray?

But even as he scornfully asked the question he knew that it was not so; that the spell of this face had its root deep in the past, in that golden evening when he sat under the orange trees and tried in vain to shake the grateful loyalty of a child. He knew now that he had never forgotten that child, and the deep impression which her absolute unselfishness had made on him, an impression deeper because it had been contrasted with such utter selfishness on the part of another. He had seemed to come very near to that little maiden of the past in the hour when her nature and her heart

had been, as it were, laid bare before him; and so it was to no stranger that he had so quickly surrendered his own heart, which had long been swept and garnished and empty of any occupant.

Meanwhile Mrs. Meredith was clamoring for another song. "You are surely not going to stop with one!" she cried. "We want another, and yet another—don't we, Aimée?"

"Just as many as Mr. Kyrle will give us," responded Aimée, smiling.

It was easier to sing than to talk; so Kyrle again lifted his voice, this time in a Spanish serenade as full of the spirit of passionate romance as a Spanish night. But something had gone from the singer's voice, and, charming as was the song, no one was moved and thrilled as by the first.

IV.

FANNY MEREDITH was right in saying that the Joscelyns watched Aimée and every man who approached her like dragons. And from

their point of view, this was natural enough. Had not Aimée's fortune lifted them out of poverty and the embarrassments resulting therefrom, to a condition of affluence where all things became easy and agreeable? And could they be expected to surrender the advantages of this fortune without a struggle? It was true that they had enjoyed these advantages for five or six years, in which time Major Joscelyn, through whose hands the income passed, had made not a few excellent investments on his own account; and that Aimée, as soon as she attained her majority, had settled an independence on her mother. Yet these things did not make them one whit more inclined to surrender any part of the heritage which they had grown to consider their own. Since it was, however, undeniable that Aimée, although the most gentle and yielding of human beings, had certain rights in her own property which the law would secure to her, and which a husband, should she marry, might be brutal enough to claim in her behalf, it became necessary that she should marry some one who could be trusted

to consider the Joscelyn interest of primary importance; and this could only be one of the Joscelyns themselves. It was therefore early decreed in the family councils that Percy Joscelyn should in time marry the young heiress. There had been considerable consternation when he returned with her from St. Augustine and reported a mysterious lover already on the horizon; especially since inquiries drew no information concerning this person from Aimée. "He was a gentleman whom I knew," she said, and not even her mother could obtain from her anything more.

Then Major Joscelyn solemnly announced that any such thing as a probable or possible love affair must be promptly nipped in the bud, and that the quickest and most complete way to accomplish this was to take the girl abroad. Her education, which up to this time had been of the most desultory order, furnished a good plea, and the entire Joscelyn family conveyed themselves at once to foreign fields. They had never returned to America. Nothing would have been easier than to place Aimée in a French or German school, where

she would not have required the attention of her entire family; but that would not have given an excuse for a residence in Paris, which they all found very agreeable. So a handsome establishment was mounted, and after its expenses were paid, besides the investments on the major's account already mentioned, there was not a great deal to spare for Aimée's education. Expensive masters, therefore, she never had; but very good though not fashionable teachers can be obtained in Paris for low prices, and it was not in Aimée's nature to make any demands for herself. She took eager advantage of the scant opportunities allowed her, and accomplished an education for which she had little to thank her guardians.

There was some uneasiness in the family mind when the time of her majority approached; but it passed quietly, and, whether through indifference, or ignorance of the full extent of her power, she made no attempt to take the control of her income from Major Joscelyn's hands. So things had gone on as usual, and the family were hoping that before

very long Percy might come into possession of the much-coveted fortune, when who should appear on the scene but Fanny Meredith! At once the Joscelyns felt that the time had come when they would have to fight for Aimée. They no longer had legal control of her movements; and although she still yielded submission to the wishes of her mother (which meant the wishes of Major Joscelyn), they instinctively felt that it would not do to try this submissiveness too far. So, when Mrs. Meredith proposed that Aimée should join her husband and herself in a tour through Italy, the Joscelyns held a council of war, and decided that, while it was impossible to allow her to go, it was equally unadvisable to strain obedience too far. The brilliant mind of Major Joscelyn again found the remedy. "We will *all* go," he said. "It is not—ahem!—what one would desire, to wander about Italian cities for several months; but Aimée can not be trusted with this flighty woman, who would not only introduce all manner of—hum—dangerous acquaintances to her, but who would delight to undermine our

influence. Neither will it do to positively refuse to let her go; so we must sacrifice ourselves and accompany her."

The sacrifice, therefore, to Fanny Meredith's great disgust, was made. The family picked themselves up, and in solid phalanx accompanied their heiress to Italy, keeping vigilant watch and ward over her and over every possible dangerous acquaintance whom she made. But they were little prepared for the unkind stroke of Fate which brought Lennox Kyrle across their path. That his appearance in Venice was an accident they did not believe for an instant. They strongly suspected that Fanny Meredith had, together with him, planned this appearance to take place when Aimée should have been removed from her family environment. They congratulated themselves that so much, at least, had been frustrated by their foreseeing vigilance, but they had not the least doubt that Kyrle had come with the determination to secure her hand and fortune, if that desirable end could be attained by unholy arts and incredible audacity. What was to be done to frustrate and check this au-

dacity? Such was the question the family met in solemn conclave to consider on the day after the undesirable intruder had appeared.

"He is not to be shaken off easily," said Percy Joscelyn, "for Mrs. Meredith encourages him in every way. Last night she not only invited him to join us as we sat outside Florian's, but she proposed going out in a gondola, took him along, and made him sing. He sings uncommonly well—confound him! —and almost made love to Aimée before my eyes."

"The fellow's impudence seems to be equal to anything!" said the major. "And how did Aimée receive his—ah—advances?"

"You can never tell much about Aimée," his son answered. "She is quiet, and she's deep. She didn't seem responsive, but that signifies nothing. Under ordinary circumstances I might think that he had made no impression on her; but these are not ordinary circumstances, and the trouble is that we don't know what the extent of their first acquaintance was. Although Mrs. Berrien denied it, I shall always believe that there had been some

love-making going on between them in St. Augustine."

"And yet Aimée was certainly not very attractive at that time," observed Miss Joscelyn.

"There's no accounting for tastes," said her brother, curtly, "and facts are facts. I *saw* him give her a locket—something which, you know, she always declined to explain."

"Yes," said Mrs. Joscelyn, with a sigh, "she was very obstinate and as close as wax. But I have always had an idea that he was not a lover, because, in the first place, she said so—and Aimée always told the truth—and, in the second place, because she never seemed to have any fancy for lovers, like other girls.—You know, Lydia, how often you have remarked that Aimée was so old-fashioned in this respect."

"Yes," assented Lydia, "but, as Percy says, Aimée is deep, and I don't really feel that I know very much about her. As for the matter of the locket, though," added the speaker with a sudden gleam of intuition, "that was as likely as not one of Fanny Meredith's tricks. She was an outrageous flirt!"

"If I thought so!" exclaimed Percy Joscelyn, with a start. His eyes flashed as he spoke. Many a score had he to pay Fanny Meredith, who in truth took a malicious pleasure in frustrating his attempts to establish a claim upon Aimée; and if it were possible to bring anything out of the past against her, how delighted he would be to use it remorselessly! "But there is not the least proof of such a thing," he said, almost resentfully, to his sister.

"No; it was only an idea that occurred to me," she replied; "but I know what Fanny Berrien was, and I believe that, if you could induce Aimée to speak, you would find that it was so."

"Then, in that case," said the major, "you don't believe the man was Aimée's lover at all?"

"It does not matter what she believes," Percy somewhat rudely interposed. "Opinions, without any ground of proof, amount to nothing. I know what I saw, and I know that the fellow has eyes only for Aimée now; and that Mrs. Meredith, as I have already

said, encourages him by every means in her power."

"Then," said the major, sharply, "one thing is certain: Aimée can not be allowed to go out with the Merediths."

"How will you prevent it?" Percy asked. "The last thing advisable is to force her to declare her independence of us, and any ill-judged attempt at control would do this. Nothing would please Mrs. Meredith better than to prompt her to such a course. No; watchfulness is our only resource—watchfulness, and perhaps stratagem. If it were possible to leave Venice now—"

"That would be the best thing," said the major, "only—ah—what is to prevent this objectionable person from following us?"

"If that were all," said Percy, "I should leave at once, and trust to luck or the shortness of his purse to prevent his following. But the real objection is that we could not be certain that Aimée would consent to go; and we could neither force her to do so nor leave her with the Merediths. So, departure is not to be thought of. We must fight the thing

out by watchfulness and stratagem, as I have said."

"Watchfulness—yes," said his father, "that is plain, and of course necessary; but what stratagem do you propose?"

"I propose, for one thing, that some person shall always take charge of Mr. Kyrle, and prevent him from devoting himself to Aimée."

"But how is any one to take charge of Mr. Kyrle—without his consent?" asked Mrs. Joscelyn, feebly.

"A man's consent is always taken for granted where a lady is concerned," young Joscelyn answered. "Lydia, here, might be equal to the delicate task, I think. All that is required is that she shall quietly take possession of Mr. Kyrle on all occasions, and make it impossible for him to attach himself to Aimée.—It is a task after your own heart," he went on, addressing his sister with more than the suspicion of a brotherly sneer in his tone "I have seen you on many occasions monopolize men very much against their will. Do you think you can manage the same thing with Kyrle?"

A flush rose to her cheek and was visible through the powder that covered it. "You are as insulting as usual," she said.

"On the contrary, I am most flattering," he returned, suavely—for he felt that Lydia's assistance was essential at this juncture of affairs. "Only a woman of rare powers can do these things. A stupid woman or a clumsy woman can never succeed in them. It requires a peculiar tact to take possession of a man and keep him fastened to your side whether he likes or not."

"I understand perfectly all that you mean to imply," she said, coldly; "and if I do this thing it is not out of regard for you or your plans, but because I have an object of my own in it."

"Whatever your object," her brother replied, "only *do* the thing, and I shall be satisfied, and never doubt your powers again."

V.

But while the family council was thus laying plans for keeping Aimée and her old acquaintance apart, Fortune, which sometimes takes up weapons and fights for those who have neither heart nor power to fight for themselves, had most unexpectedly brought them together.

It was quite early in the morning, soon after he had taken that light collation which on the Continent is called the first breakfast, that Kyrle, sauntering on the Piazza and asking himself whether he should fulfill his engagement of calling on Mrs. Meredith, or whether he should, more sensibly, leave Venice, these old entanglements, and new perils, behind him, suddenly perceived a lady, accompanied by her maid, just entering the great portal of the cathedral. He had not sat behind that figure the day before and studied it in vain. He recognized at once the elegant outlines, the graceful carriage, and without a moment's hesitation he followed her into the church, as he

had long ago followed her into the Florida orange grove.

Who does not know by sight or by fame that wonderful interior in whose darkness lies hid the spoils of the Orient, and whose ancient pavement in its undulations seems to imitate the waves of the sea that cradles it? Kyrle knew it well; but just now he was not thinking of gorgeous mosaics, or marvelous carving, of columns of verd-antique, jasper, or porphyry; his eyes were searching the gloom of the vast edifice for the figure which had entered a few minutes before, and some time elapsed before he discovered what he sought, in a chapel where a priest was saying mass and a small congregation were assembled.

As he drew near the chapel, struck by the infinitely picturesque scene—the rich, jewel-incrusted altar, the priest in his golden vestments, the contrasts of rank and costume in the forms kneeling on the pavement—he suddenly saw Aimée, her maid on one side, on the other a Venetian girl with a black lace shawl thrown over such red-gold hair as Titian painted, while a shaft of sunlight from

some high, remote window brought out the delicate fairness of her face from the shadowy obscurity around. Satisfied with having found the object of his search, Kyrle paused, and, leaning against a pillar, waited until the service was over and those who had assisted thereat were dispersing. Then he stepped from the shadow of the pillar and presented himself to Aimée. She looked a little surprised, but greeted him quietly, and together they walked toward the entrance.

"I was about to remark that I am fortunate to meet you," Kyrle said presently, "but one should pay a sacred edifice the compliment of being strictly truthful while within its walls, shouldn't one? And the truth in this case is that I saw you come in and followed you. I am thinking of leaving Venice to-day."

If he had intended to surprise her by the announcement, he must have been disappointed by the calmness with which she replied: "You are leaving Venice to-day? Is not that sooner than you anticipated?"

"I had made no plans," he answered. "When I paused here, I did not intend to

linger more than a few days. And now, though I am strongly tempted to remain, I— Well, I think I had better go."

Almost every one has had occasion to learn more than once in life the extreme difficulty of keeping all trace of strong feeling out of the voice. Kyrle was conscious of being somewhat exasperated with himself and Fate, as he uttered the last words, and naturally the inflection of his tone betrayed the feeling. Aimée glanced at him quickly—involuntarily, it appeared—and in the light of that glance there suddenly flashed upon him an understanding of what interpretation she might give to his words. Her eyes seemed to say, "Ah, is *that* it!" But before he could collect his thoughts sufficiently to know how to explain himself, she had looked away again and was saying in her clear, low voice: "If you think it best, of course you are right to go. And one should not attempt to change your resolution."

"No one is likely to attempt to change it," he replied, with a slight laugh. "But I think you misunderstand me a little," he added,

after a pause, with a sudden impulse of candor. "We were once thrown together very singularly; I am sure you do not forget this any more than I do. Therefore, since we are not strangers, will you let me speak to you frankly?"

"Surely, if you wish to do so," she answered; but he saw that she looked a little startled.

"Do not be afraid," he said, quietly. "I have no intention of saying anything that you need hesitate to hear. But may I ask you to sit down for a moment?"

They were now in the *atrium*, or inner porch of the church. Aimée hesitated for an instant, then, turning to her maid, said in French:

"Go to the Merceria and make the purchases of which you spoke. I will wait for you here."

"Oui, mademoiselle," replied the girl, without the change of a feature, and forthwith departed.

Kyrle could hardly believe his good fortune, but as Aimée sat down on one of the

stone benches fixed against the wall, he said, gratefully:

"You are very kind—as kind as I remember you of old. And I have no more forgotten how kind you were then, than I have ceased to thank Heaven for the message you so bravely brought me."

She looked up at him and he saw in her face that she was astonished.

"But—" she began, and then paused.

"But you thought that I meant something else a minute ago," he said. "You thought I meant that I found it best to go because I felt the old attraction reviving. Is it not so?"

She dropped her eyes. "Was it not natural that I should think so?" she asked.

"Perhaps it was natural," he answered, "but you were mistaken. My only sentiment with regard to that past folly is one of sincerest thankfulness for my escape. The last time we sat like this together—have you forgotten the evening in the orange grove?—I told you that my fancy for Fanny Berrien was dead, killed by her duplicity to me and her selfishness toward you. I may have been a little

melodramatic, but I meant exactly what I said. From that day to this her memory has not cost me a pang. As for Mrs. Meredith, she is a very pretty and amusing person, who acted altogether according to her kind, and to whom for her conduct toward myself I bear no malice whatever. On the contrary, my sentiment toward her is one of lively gratitude—although I have never forgiven her for her conduct toward you."

Aimée had lifted her eyes now, and was looking at him again very steadily. It was as if she were deciding in her own mind the question of his sincerity. Then she said, with her old simplicity and directness:

"But why do you wish to tell this to me?"

"Because," he answered, "whether I go or whether I stay, I do not wish you to regard me as the victim of a hopeless passion for the wife of Mr. Meredith."

"I should scarcely have thought that," she answered; "but it was surely natural to fancy that you might remember—with pain—"

"Oh, no; it is no matter for pain," he said, as she hesitated—"only for a light-comedy

smile and sigh. Fancies of that sort come and go like dreams. One must know many of them before one learns what love really is."

She turned her dark, meditative eyes away from him. On one side was the interior of the marvelous old church, gleaming with marbles and precious stones; on the other the sunshiny Piazza, with its graceful arcades and flocks of sheeny pigeons. She looked toward the last as she said:

"I do not think I like such an idea."

"You?" he said, quickly. "No; how could *you* like it? It is not meant to apply to natures like yours."

"Is it not?" she asked, with a smile. "But how can you tell that, when you know nothing of my nature?"

"Do you think I know nothing of your nature?" he asked, smiling also. "If I had time, and you did not consider me too presumptuous, I might prove the contrary, for you forget all that you showed me once—all the courage, the unselfishness, the humility. But I do not forget. And has no one ever

told you that you carry your soul on your lips and your heart in your eyes?"

"No," she replied, "I do not remember that any one ever told me so before—at least not exactly. But perhaps Fanny means the same thing when she tells me that my face is 'ridiculously transparent.'"

"It is only a different way of stating the same thing," said Kyrle, and then they both laughed.

"But seriously," said he, after a moment, conscious of a very pleasant sense of *camaraderie* with this beautiful companion, "have you no idea how you revealed yourself to me at that last meeting of ours under the orange trees? How I can see you this moment, as you were then—such a delicate, childlike creature, but with a strength of resolution against which I arrayed all *my* strength in vain! And then, when you opened your heart and told me the sad story of your life, and how it was gratitude which made you so resolute—do you think I could ever forget anything so touching? Many a time, in the years which have passed since then, I have

thought of that scene, and said to myself, 'God bless that child wherever she may be, for she has a heart as tender as it is brave!'"

Something in his voice told her that he was speaking genuinely, without the least insincerity or thought of effect, and she could not but give him a grateful glance from the same dark eyes which had impressed him with their wonderful power of expression on the occasion of which he spoke. "You are very kind," she said, trying to speak lightly, "to have remembered an obstinate child so long!"

"You were certainly very obstinate," he said; "but how brave you were! To think of your having had the courage to go alone to the sea wall that night, and to think of the selfishness and cowardice that sent you! Pardon me for asking the question, but has no opportunity ever occurred for you to set yourself right in that matter?"

She shook her head. "How could it?" she asked. "Fanny has never had the courage to tell her husband the truth. But nothing disagreeable has arisen from it—to me, I

mean," she added, a little hurriedly. "You know you were afraid of that."

"Yes," he said. "I am very glad that you have never been annoyed; still, it is a shame that such a belief should be in the mind of any one with regard to you."

He spoke out, quickly and hotly, the indignation that on this subject was always within him and ready to find expression; but he was sorry the next moment for the words when he saw a swift blush rise into her face, as with the sudden realization of what the belief was to which he alluded. Angry with himself, he went on hastily:

"This being so—I mean, the burden of Mrs. Meredith's conduct being still borne by you—I feel that I am bound to abstain on my part from anything which might cause you the least annoyance; and so I have determined to go away. There shall not be the least misapprehension about you, arising from any act of mine."

So much was truth; but, like many other people, Kyrle did not find it advisable to tell all the truth. He could not say, "Also, I

am going, because if I stay I shall fall in love with you, and that will never do, for I am a poor man, and you are a rich woman." But this was in his mind, even while the temptation was growing greater every instant to forget both of these stubborn facts. Aimée was silent for a moment, and then—for the old courage, as well as the old simplicity, was still strong in her—she looked at him with her brave, direct glance, and said:

"If this is your reason for leaving Venice, I hope that you will not think of going. Your presence does not cause me the least annoyance; and I should be more sorry than I can tell you if mine were such an annoyance to you that we could not even remain in the same city. For, do you think I forget that if you are in a false position, it was my obstinacy that placed, or at least kept you there? How earnestly you appealed to me, and I could not yield! And are you now to be the sufferer by being driven away from this heavenly place? No, Mr. Kyrle, there is no justice in that. I will not allow it!"

He could have smiled at the energy with

which she spoke, partly because he read in it the old generous spirit, taking no heed or thought of herself, and partly because, in urging him to remain, she proved that she so little suspected the chief reason why departure seemed to him necessary. What he would have answered it is hard to say, for at that moment the maid, bearing some packages, made her appearance, and Aimée, rousing to the consciousness that there was something very unconventional in this prolonged conversation, rose rather hastily, bade him good-morning, and walked away.

"Going to leave Venice?" said Fanny Meredith. "What an absurd idea! What do you mean by it?"

The time was two hours later than when, standing in the shadow of the cathedral porch, Kyrle had watched Aimée cross the sunshine-flooded Piazza; and the place was the privacy of Mrs. Meredith's sitting-room in the Grand Hotel. The two people who occupied it were alone together for the first time since they had parted as lovers; but it is safe to say that this

thought was not in the mind of either of them. Kyrle, leaning back in a deep chair, was gazing absently out of the window at the beautiful proportions of Santa Maria della Salute just across the Grand Canal, while Mrs. Meredith, with her pretty brows knitted, was gazing at *him*.

"I mean," he said slowly, in reply to her last words, "that I think it is the only wise course open to me."

She threw herself back with an impatient gesture. "You are as incomprehensible as ever!" she exclaimed. "Now, what on earth do you mean by the only wise course open to you?"

"Briefly, then," said Kyrle, "you were shrewd enough to observe last night that I am in danger of falling in love with Miss Vincent—"

"Oh, no," said Fanny, shaking her head, "I observed that the thing was already accomplished."

"There you are mistaken," said he; "it is not already accomplished. Or if it were," he added, lamely, "there is the more reason for

my going away, since I only expose myself to useless pain by remaining."

"But why useless pain?" asked she. "Have you so faint a heart that you are afraid of Percy Joscelyn as a rival?"

"Not at all," answered he, calmly. "But it is quite impossible for me to become his rival. Have you not told me that Miss Vincent is a great heiress?"

"Yes; she has a large fortune in her own right, and without any restrictions—happy girl!"

"I hope it may prove for her happiness," said Kyrle, rather gloomily, "but it is an effectual bar to any hope on my part. A newspaper correspondent would hardly be a fit *parti* for such an heiress."

"And whose fault is it that you are a newspaper correspondent?" asked Mrs. Meredith, with a malice born of past recollections. "But, in my opinion, that is all nonsense," she went on, briskly. "Birth and social position are the things to be considered, rather than a mere accident of money."

"The accident of money is what the world

considers," said he, "and I must consider it also. For myself, I have perhaps thought of it too little. If so, I am punished by finding it now an insuperable barrier between myself and the woman I might love."

Fanny opened her lips to speak, but apparently thought better of it before any words escaped. She closed them again and sat silent for a moment, evidently reflecting. Then she looked at Kyrle with an expression of resigned regret.

"I remember how ob—that is, determined you are," she said; "so I suppose there is nothing to be gained by arguing the matter. But since your mind is so fully made up, why should you run away? I thought that was the resource of weakness and indecision."

"No doubt it is," said he, falling into the artful trap, "and I felt very weak last night, I assure you. But, after all, there is no reason why I should go at once—" looking out at the enchanting sea and sky, and remembering Aimée's last words. "A day or two can not matter, and it is nobody's affair but my own

if I choose to pay for present pleasure by future pain."

"Oh, dear, no—not anybody's affair at all," said Fanny. "And then, you can so easily take another trip to Egypt and forget all about it. I really wish you would stay," she added, persuasively. "We might have such a pleasant time wandering about Venice! And a man need not abjure the society of a woman because he thinks her too rich to marry."

"No, certainly not," said Lennox, though he knew in his heart that this was sophistry. "Well, at least I will not go to-day. I will stay as long as I first intended—that is, two or three days longer."

"How nice of you!" said Fanny, with a gleam of triumph in her eyes. "And you will also stay to breakfast?"

"You are very kind, but not to-day. If you are going anywhere this afternoon, however, and will allow me to join you—"

"We are going out to the Lido. Meet us there, and we can all return together. And one word—don't mind the incivility of the

Joscelyns. They are uncivil because they are afraid of you."

"I am very well aware of that," said he, with a smile. Then his heart sank, and his voice also, as he added, "But if they only knew it, they have no cause for fear."

"They are wiser than to believe that. And so am I," thought Fanny; but she took very good care not to utter her thought aloud.

VI.

SOMEWHAT to Mrs. Meredith's and also to Kyrle's own surprise, he had no incivility to encounter from any of the Joscelyns when he joined their party on the Lido that afternoon. The heads of the family received him courteously, if stiffly, and Miss Joscelyn greeted him like an old friend. Indeed, by what means he could not for the life of him tell, she soon managed to monopolize his attention, calling upon him for the little services which no gentleman can refuse to render to a woman, and presently drawing him aside from the rest

of the party to walk with her on the beach, while she discoursed to him of many things in heaven and earth which did not interest him in the least. His judgment upon her, meanwhile, was uncompromising.

"A mass of silliness and affectation," he said to himself, but in this he did her some injustice. She was not only less silly than he imagined—possessing, in fact, a good deal of shrewdness—but at the present time she had an object in view in her discursive conversation which his irritated and distracted mind was far from perceiving.

For it is to be feared that, had pearls of wit and wisdom dropped from her lips, they would have fallen on equally inattentive ears. Kyrle had said sternly to himself, while on his way to the Lido, that he would be very careful not to devote himself to Aimée; that, because she had asked him to remain in Venice, he was the more bound not to cause her the faintest shadow of annoyance by attentions that might be misconstrued; and that he would only allow himself the pleasure of seeing and of talking to her, as any other chance acquaintance might.

But to renounce voluntarily some happiness for which Nature longs is one thing, and to have it forcibly placed beyond reach by outside agency is another. Even if the happiness in question is no more than looking into a pair of soft, dark eyes, and listening to ordinary sentences uttered in a sweet voice, one may be supported in voluntary renunciation by a sense of virtue which is altogether lacking in feeling that the matter is taken out of one's own power. So Kyrle chafed inwardly against the quiet but resolute hold of Miss Joscelyn upon his attention, even while he said to himself that it was in a degree what he had intended, and that he was glad of an opportunity to prove to these people what an absurd fiction it was that he had ever been Aimée's lover.

Yet all the time he was conscious of an insistent desire, the hunger of the heart which comes with love, to renew the charm of that half hour in the *atrium* of St. Mark's, to take up the thread of conversation where they had dropped it, and feel again that sense of sympathy and comradeship, of understanding and being understood, which had quickened all his

being into new life. And, instead of this, he was pacing the beach with Lydia Joscelyn, and lending half an ear to what he called in his own mind empty twaddle.

Twaddle it might be, but empty—that is, devoid of meaning—it was not. Lydia, with an art which did her credit, approached slowly but surely to the point she had distinctly in view; and presently she touched it.

"Percy tells me that you sing beautifully, Mr. Kyrle," she said. "He declares that he never heard anything finer than your singing in the gondola last night. You must come out with us to-night and let me hear you. I adore fine singing. I wonder that Aimée never mentioned that you had such a fine voice."

Kyrle, roused from partial abstraction by the sound of Aimée's name, fell unconsciously into the trap. "I do not think that Miss Vincent knew anything about my voice," he replied, "so it would have been difficult for her to say anything about it."

"No!" said his companion, opening her eyes. "I thought I had understood that you were *quite* old friends."

This roused him thoroughly, for the tone implied much more than the words. The indignation which was ever ready to be excited on this point rose within him, as it had risen before that day. He determined that nothing should induce him to lend his aid to Fanny Berrien's deception, and allow these people to fancy injurious things of Aimée. Miss Joscelyn was a little startled by the haughtiness of his glance as he turned it on her.

"I could esteem nothing more of an honor," he said, stiffly, "than to have been either an old or a new friend of Miss Vincent. But, in point of fact, our acquaintance in the past was very slight, as your knowledge that she was quite a child at the time might inform you."

"Oh!" said Miss Joscelyn. Even her self-possession had need to recover itself after this *douche* of cold water. But, while she exclaimed mentally that he was a perfect churl, her resentment was accompanied by a sense of triumph. "There *is* a mystery," she thought, "and I am sure that Fanny Meredith is at the bottom of it!" With a laudable desire of probing further, therefore, she went on:

"We have all misunderstood a little, then," she said, with some significance. "There has been an impression created—not so much by Aimée as by Mrs. Meredith—that you were friends in a very particular sense. I think," she added, with an air of carefully weighing her words, "that it is a pity such an impression should be allowed to remain, if it does Aimée an injustice."

"If such an impression exists," said Kyrle, with emphasis, "it certainly does Miss Vincent the greatest injustice, and should not be permitted to remain. I repeat that my acquaintance with her was very slight, and that I thought of her only as a child, though I was struck by some qualities very remarkable in a child, which she displayed."

"It is singular, since your acquaintance with her was so slight, that you should have been able to discover these qualities," observed Miss Joscelyn, innocently, "for Aimée is *very* reserved, very secretive, one may say, in her nature."

"There were circumstances which called out the qualities," said Kyrle, briefly; for he

began to understand that he was being subjected to a process vulgarly known as pumping, and he had no idea of either gratifying Miss Joscelyn's curiosity or betraying Fanny Meredith's secret, unless defense of Aimée should make the last absolutely necessary.

"It is rather difficult to imagine what circumstances calculated to draw out remarkable qualities could have thrown together a shy child like Aimée and a young man like yourself," said Miss Joscelyn, musingly. She glanced at him, and since the expression of his face said plainly that he declined to be communicative regarding these circumstances, she proved her talent for cross-examination by a swift and unexpected diversion:

"What a very attractive girl Fanny Berrien was at that time! Speaking of your acquaintance with Aimée reminds me that it was during that winter in Florida she became engaged to Mr. Meredith. It was said that she jilted another man shamefully—some one to whom she had been engaged a long time—in order to marry him."

"Very likely," responded Kyrle, feeling

bound to make some comment. "I should imagine that Mrs. Meredith was never inclined to limit herself in strings to her bow."

"She was always a dreadful flirt!" said Lydia, shaking her head with an air of virtuous reprobation. "I fancy Mr. Meredith does not know a quarter of her escapades."

"Are we not always informed that, where ignorance is bliss, only folly would desire to be wise?" replied Kyrle, impatiently. "But shall we not return to your party? I think I see some one waving to us."

Some one was indeed waving energetically and when they reached the group they found them in readiness to embark on the return voyage. In fact, the Merediths, Aimée, and Percy Joscelyn already filled one gondola. Fanny met Kyrle's crestfallen look with a mocking gleam in her eye.

"All things do *not* come to him who waits too long," she said, oracularly. "Had you been a little earlier, I might have offered you a place with us; but now you will have to return as you came, alone, unless Lydia allows you to recline at her feet."

"We shall be very happy if Mr. Kyrle will come with us," said the major, blandly.

But Mr. Kyrle declined, more emphatically than was necessary. His own gondola was waiting, he said, and (this the merest and vaguest politeness), since he was alone, could he not offer a seat to any one?

Miss Joscelyn and her brother exchanged glances, and then the young lady sweetly spoke: "Since you are so kind, Mr. Kyrle—it really *is* too bad for you to have to return alone—and as there are only two comfortable seats in a gondola, I will give mine to papa and come with you."

She held out her hand to be assisted into the boat, and Kyrle, mentally anathematizing his own politeness, muttered that he was "delighted," Fanny Meredith laughed rather irrelevantly, and they all pushed off.

What a picture it was when they were floating on the wide lagoon, with Venice rising before them out of the shining waters, its domes and towers enveloped in the golden haze of sunset, like some dream of fancy, too magically fair for reality! In such an hour

and scene, who does not long for sympathetic companionship? Poor Kyrle at least did, as instinctively he glanced toward the gondola that held Aimée, and thought how different all this glory of earth and sky, all the enchanted lovelness of the most poetical spot on earth, would have appeared to him had he been able to see it reflected in her eyes.

"Upon my word, Lydia, you astonished me this afternoon!" Mr. Percy Joscelyn condescended to say to his sister that evening. "I really had no idea of your ability before. You managed the situation perfectly. I never saw anything better done than the way you took possession of Kyrle." He laughed softly. "The fellow's face, when he stepped into his gondola, was a study!"

Lydia flushed at the laugh. She was pleased to be commended—to have proved conclusively that she had power to do what she had undertaken; but her vanity suffered under the imputation that she had forced herself upon an unwilling man. No woman likes to feel this. Even if it be a fact, she

conceals it as far as possible from herself, and never forgives the person who thrusts it brutally before her.

"I did not find it at all difficult to monopolize Mr. Kyrle, as you call it," she said, with a tone of offense in her voice. "He did not seem to object to being monopolized. And about Aimée—I have found out just what I expected—he never was her lover at all."

"How do you know?" asked her brother, eagerly.

"Because he told me so. Oh, you need not laugh! I was not foolish enough to ask the question as a question; I made him tell me what I wanted to know without his hardly being aware that he was telling it. I think I remember all the conversation. It was like this—"

She proceeded to give a fairly accurate report of it, to which Percy listened with the keenest attention, and, when she finished, admitted that her conclusions were probably right.

"I agree with you that it was most likely some tricky game of Fanny Berrien's, in which

she used Aimée as a blind," he said. "And, late in the day as it is, there is nothing I should like so much as to get on the track of it and expose her. But we have no proof—none whatever—for you say this fellow will not speak, and we know that Aimée will not."

"He may speak—that is, he may give me information without intending to do so, as he did this afternoon," Lydia calmly replied. "I don't despair of finding out the whole thing; but, after all, it has no great bearing on the present state of affairs."

"More than you imagine," her brother said. "A hold on Mrs. Meredith would be the most useful thing possible to me just now. If, as I don't doubt, this man was an old lover of hers, she has not only deceived her husband with regard to him, but she is now bringing him forward as a suitor for Aimée. Give me one iota of proof of the story we both believe, and I will go to her and say: 'You have probably still sufficient influence over Mr. Kyrle to send him away. If not, I shall have the pleasure of telling Mr. Meredith the story of your love affair with him in the past. Get

me the proof, Lydia—give me the power to say this—and there is nothing you can ask me that I will not do for you."

"I will do my best," said Lydia, "but absolute proof is difficult to get, you know. One may be perfectly certain, and yet not have that."

"I know," Percy answered. "But anything that would give me a hold over that woman—" He broke off in his speech, but the intensity of his tone boded little good to Fanny Meredith should that hold over her be obtained. "One thing, at least, is certain," he resumed after a moment—"the man explicitly denied to you that he had ever been Aimée's lover."

"Explicitly and emphatically."

"Then that point is number one secured. This is a good beginning. Continue the work, Lydia, and let us see how long Mr. Kyrle will allow himself to be monopolized."

VII.

Mr. Kyrle allowed himself to be monopolized almost unresistingly for several days. Not indeed as completely as at the Lido, but to a degree sufficient to prevent any satisfactory intercourse with Aimée. A sudden passion for excursions seemed to have seized the Joscelyns, who had hitherto seen as little as possible of the different places in which they had unwillingly sojourned, and who had seemed quite insensible to any claims of art or history upon their attention. Now, however, they discovered that the neighborhood of Venice abounded in places of interest; and Lydia arranged one excursion after another to the adjacent islands, excursions which Kyrle was invited to join, and during which he was carefully kept as much as possible apart from Aimée.

The tactics by which this was managed were beautifully simple. He found himself sitting by Miss Joscelyn's side in a gondola, carrying her shawl, offering her his arm when-

ever the need for an arm arose, without in the least understanding how it all came about. But one of the lookers-on understood perfectly, and laughed to herself with an amusement not untinctured by malice. "He declined my aid," Mrs. Meredith thought, "so I shall leave him to Lydia's mercy. A man, poor creature, is so helpless in such a case!"

This man was certainly very helpless. There was not in him any of the tincture of brutality which exists in men who can release themselves from such a position by the simplest and most direct methods. He could not be deaf when a woman asked for assistance; he could not refuse to hold a parasol over her when she requested him to do so, nor leave her alone when, falling behind the others, she pleaded fatigue and begged to "rest a little." They were all threadbare artifices, but still strong enough to hold one who to the instincts of a gentleman in such matters added a certain hopelessness with regard to his own affairs. For, after all, he said to himself, he had made up his mind not to compromise Aimée by attentions of a loverlike char-

acter, and it was well that Lydia Joscelyn should help him to keep this somewhat difficult resolution.

But it was a resolution which every day became more difficult, as every day the charm that breathed from her presence laid deeper hold upon him. Despite the vigilance of the Joscelyns, they had occasional opportunities for conversation, and every such opportunity seemed to him to strengthen that impression of a rare individuality which she had from their first acquaintance made upon him. Now and then there were glimpses of thoughts and feelings that lay usually hidden under the gentle composure with which she met the world; and these glimpses, he had a fancy, were given only to him. One of these rare occasions occurred on an excursion to one of the islands, where they encountered another group of tourists, who, proving to be acquaintances, distracted for a time the attention of the rest of the party and so made it possible for him to find Aimée alone. She was sitting, when he discovered her, under the shadow of the cloisters belonging to the ancient and partially de-

serted monastic building they were supposed to be examining, gazing seaward; and as he approached unobserved, he was struck by the wistful, almost sad expression of her face. The expression vanished as she became conscious of his presence; only a slight shadow still lingered in her eyes as she turned them on him. But she spoke, with a smile:

"Does a scene like this," she said, indicating the wide, beautiful marine picture spread before them, "ever rouse in you the expectation of seeing a sail rise up from 'the underworld' bringing some wonderful good fortune to you? I am always expecting it. I never look at an ocean horizon without saying to myself, 'When will my sail come?'"

"I thought," he said, as he sat down beside her, "that your sail had come, bearing what most people consider the best of good fortune."

"You mean money?" she asked. "Yes, that came to me, and I am not so ungrateful as to underrate its value, though I can not say it has done much for me; but I am not thinking of anything so prosaic, in look-

ing for my fairy sail. That will bring—ah, I know not what, but something that will give a different meaning to life. All things seem possible there"—she waved her hand toward the distant meeting-place of sea and sky; "one feels as if everything for which one longs might come out of that mysterious distance."

"But if the magic fortune delays, why not go in search of it?" Kyrle asked, smiling at the fancifulness of the talk. "Shall we embark? Behind that dim line we may find all that we have lacked in life awaiting us."

She shook her head. "No," she answered; "I have no heart to search the unknown. I am one of those who can only sit on the shore and wait the coming of the sail, however much it may delay."

Something in her tone, an unconscious echo of the sadness still lurking in her eyes, made Kyrle realize more fully than he had ever done before that her life was certainly not happy. How, indeed, could happiness in any positive degree exist in such an environment as hers? Physical well-being, the com-

fort and luxury of wealth were hers; but what besides, what love for the tender heart, what sympathy for the aspiring mind? No wonder that the dark, wistful eyes sought the horizon for the magic sail that should bring some meaning into her colorless days. A rush of pity made speech impossible to him for several minutes, and with pity came a longing like a passion to seize and bear her away from the odious people who surrounded and preyed upon her, into the sunshine of such a full and generous existence as her nature craved. It was the force of repression which he had to exert upon himself which made his voice sound almost stern, as he said:

"The most of us can do little more than sit on the shore and wait for sails that long delay in their coming. But I fear that what we chiefly look for them to bring is that prosaic fortune which you despise."

"Oh, no," she answered, quickly, "I am not so foolish nor, as I have said, so ungrateful as to despise wealth. But if I do not rate its power as high as most people seem to do, that is natural. My fortune has really brought

me very little personal good. I have often thought that I should have been happier without it. Yet that seems ungrateful; and my family would think it sheer profanity," she added, with a smile.

"I wish," said Kyrle, with an energy that was fairly startling, "I wish to Heaven that I were a rich man! Shall I tell you what I would do? It is understood that we are in fairyland, you know. I would have a yacht—a very sea-gull for swiftness and beauty—at my bidding, and I would take you—"

"Oh, here she is!" said a voice at a little distance—the far from welcome voice of Percy Joscelyn. "Aimée, we are waiting for you."

It chanced that Kyrle was thinking of this conversation and all that it had suggested the next day as, having left the party in a church engaged in inspecting, with blank amazement, some frescoes of Carpaccio which Mr. Ruskin has held up to the admiration of the world, he went out on the little piazza before the church and sat down on the steps which led down to the canal, to wait for them. As he

sat there in the soft Venetian sunlight he was of two moods—one to go quickly, at once, out of a temptation which had become overmastering; the other, to cast all scruples to the winds, and show these people—who fancied, forsooth, that their stratagems and devices had any power to restrain him—how little such barriers of straw would stand in his way did he once resolve to take that way. Some one, who came quietly out of the church and sat down beside him, thought that at this moment he looked more like the old, masterful Lennox Kyrle than he had looked since she had seen him under these new conditions.

"I wonder," said Fanny Meredith, "if you are by this time aware that you are a very foolish man?"

He turned and looked at her. "I have been aware of it for a long time," he answered, quietly.

"And is not the knowledge of folly the beginning of wisdom? Are you not sorry now that you refused my good offices?"

"Did I refuse them? I am not sure of it. But, if so, the reason holds good now as then,

which made it impossible for me to accept them. You urged me to come forward as a suitor to your cousin, and I told you that I was too poor a man to think of doing so. My position has not changed since then."

"But if you don't see the folly of *that*, you are not at the beginning of wisdom," said she, impatiently. "Why, according to your fancy, only rich people should ever marry rich people; when, on the contrary, it should really be the other way! The proper equalizing of wealth demands that rich persons should marry poor ones."

He was not in a mirthful mood, but to refrain from laughing at this was impossible. "It is a new thing for you to appear in the character of a political economist," he said. "Your theory is well enough, and I find no fault with those who practice it. But I must decline to be one of the poor persons who aid in the equalization of wealth by such means."

"Well, *I* am one of them," said Fanny, quite unabashed, turning a diamond ring round on her finger so that its flashing splendor lent emphasis to the assertion, "and I can assure

you that it is a very good means. Pride is the matter with you," she went on, remorselessly, "and I call it a very selfish thing—much worse than the mercenary spirit, which I presume you feel very virtuous in despising! You don't deny that you are in love with Aimée; you dare not say that she is not worth a thousand times more than her fortune; and yet you are prepared to let *her* go, for the sake of the money you profess to hold in such scorn, and because the Joscelyns might call you a fortune-hunter."

This was certainly very plain speech, and contained a kernel of truth which struck Kyrle sharply. "If I have held money in scorn," he said, "it has only been with regard to myself. I know well what its value is in the eyes of others. And it is true that I think too much of my own pride, perhaps; but this is a point on which I have always been peculiarly sensitive—"

"As if I did not know that!" she interposed, with a note of that curious old resentment against his culpable indifference to mercenary considerations in her voice. "You

were so afraid of being suspected of paying court to your uncle, that you behaved outrageously to him. Oh, it was a very fine thing to show your spirit, your independence, your scorn of groveling souls that cared for money! So you lost a fortune which a little compliance with an old man's whims would have secured to you; and now you are enjoying the fine results thereof, and preparing to be guilty of the same folly, only in an aggravated form, over again!"

Some people, leaning in the windows of one of the tall, old houses across the canal, and watching the little scene curiously, remarked among themselves that the pretty foreign lady seemed to be a terrible scold, and that the poor man—her husband, probably—had little to say under her rating. "He has deserved it, no doubt," remarked one woman, enlightened by her own experience. "It is a case of jealousy, most likely."

"What a vindictive creature you are!" Kyrle was meanwhile saying, with a smile. "Why can not my old follies—for which, as you justly observe, I am now suffering—be

allowed to rest? I grant you that I was foolish, impracticable, full of pride—"

"As you are yet," she interpolated.

"Granted again. But a fortune-hunter—to be suspected of seeking a woman for her wealth—that is something I should feel very deeply. Yet Miss Vincent is indeed worth so much more than her fortune, that to speak of it in connection with her seems an insult. If she were only rid of it—"

"But she is not," said practical Fanny; "and you can hardly expect her to give it or throw it away in order to oblige you."

"I expect nothing," he answered impatiently. "And I do not understand why you should talk as if I had only to put out my hand and grasp a prize which I am sure would, under any circumstances, be far beyond my reach."

"Your humility does you credit," she said. "But in my opinion there is no reason why you should not grasp the prize if you would only resolve to make the effort. It is not on your own account that I urge you in this manner," she added, quickly, "but because I want to rescue Aimée. You do not understand,

and *she* hardly understands, in what a bondage she is held. If those people can prevent it, she will never marry anybody, unless it be Percy Joscelyn. By every possible means they keep suitors away from her; and if I had not been here, you would never have been allowed to approach her near enough to bow to her. Through me you have a chance that no other man has had before. But if you are so blind, if you throw it away for a mere scruple, if you think more of your own pride than of saving her—then you may go! I have nothing more to say to you."

She rose as she uttered the last words, and Kyrle, who had listened to the latter part of her speech with amazement, could scarcely believe that it was Fanny Meredith who was leaving him with such an air of dignity. He rose too, and made a step after her. There was a sensible quickening of interest among the heads at the windows opposite, as the scene promised to become more dramatic. "It must be a lover's quarrel," some one suggested. "If he were her husband he would not follow her."

"Stop a minute," Kyrle said. "If you have nothing more to say to me, at least let me say something to you. I have never looked at the matter in exactly the light in which you have put it. But if you will have patience, if you will give me a little time to consider, I will tell you my final decision before to-day is ended."

"In your place, I would tell mine in five minutes," said Fanny, scornfully.

"Very likely," said he, humbly, "but you must make allowances for the slowness of the masculine mind. Can I see you—will you be at home this afternoon?"

"No," she replied, after a moment's consideration, "for Mr. Meredith would likely be at home also, and we could not speak freely. But you may meet me at the top of the Campanile about sunset."

She had hardly said this, and Kyrle had no more than time to assent, when Miss Joscelyn emerged from the church and came toward them with an air of surprise.

"I have been wondering what had become of Mr. Kyrle," she said. "You really should

not have kept him from studying those extraordinary frescoes of Carpaccio."

"They are certainly extraordinary," said Fanny, dryly, "but I have not kept Mr. Kyrle from them. I found him here when I came out for a little relief of sunshine. I hope that we are done with Carpaccio now, and that we are going home. It is time for lunch, and I am hungry."

This seemed to be the general sentiment of the party, which, with a somewhat stupefied appearance—as of having taken art in rather too large a dose—now emerged from the church. The major was shaking his head. "Mr. Ruskin is, no doubt, a fine judge of painting," he was saying, "but, really—ah—hum—to send one to see such pictures as these!"

Aimée, who was walking behind with Percy, looked tired and pale, and when Kyrle met her eyes he was about to step to her side, but a hand was suddenly laid on his arm.

"Do be kind enough to raise this parasol for me," said Miss Joscelyn. "The sun is positively blinding."

Kyrle raised the parasol, and, accepting his fate, assisted her into the waiting gondola. But then, instead of following, he stepped back, and, lifting his hat quietly, bade the party adieu "until to-morrow."

"You will not join us this afternoon?" inquired Lydia, with some surprise and evident concern.

"I am sorry that I can not have that pleasure," he answered. "I have a budget of correspondence to read, and another budget to dispatch."

"Then we will defer the excursion to Murano till to-morrow," said she, positively.

Kyrle did not answer, but watched the gondola, as it moved away, with a very grave face. The moment of temptation had come now in earnest. Ought he to think of himself and his own pride, when it was a question of rescuing the fair and gentle creature who had won his heart from such a bondage as that which Fanny described? If it were true that by a singular chance he had been enabled to approach her more nearly than any other man had ever approached her, or was likely in the

future to do, did it not seem as if Fate pointed him out as her rescuer? Yet, for him, by comparison a poor man, to woo so rich a woman, to meet the insults of her friends, and bear the brand of a fortune-hunter in the eyes of the world—that was a bitter necessity to face; and, revolving it in his mind, he went slowly home.

He had been strictly within the limit of the truth when he told Miss Joscelyn that he had a budget of correspondence to read, for the accumulation of several weeks had reached him only that morning, and he had not taken time to wade through it before going out. After a light *déjeûner*, he set himself to the task, partly because it was a necessity, and partly to distract his mind from the question which he was constantly asking and altogether unable to answer.

So, after going through several letters with a very distracted attention, he took up and opened one which was addressed in a strange handwriting and bore the stamp of a legal firm. "How can I—I, who have nothing!" was the refrain echoing through his brain as

he broke the seal. But a minute later he uttered a great exclamation, and sat staring incredulously at the paper before him.

Instead of having nothing, this letter informed him that he possessed a fortune of not less than a million and a half dollars.

VIII.

THE sun had set, but there was a radiant sunset sky, as well as a view of great extent to be seen from the Campanile as two ladies stood there, and, leaning over the parapet of the great tower, looked down on Venice, with the Grand Canal winding through its midst like a silver serpent; at the coast of Istria and the blue summits of the Alps afar; and at the Adriatic spreading to meet the sky. One fastened her dark eyes on that distant line of blending sea and sky, but the other bestowed her regard chiefly on the Piazza at her feet, where people seemed to be crawling about like ants. Presently one of these ants crossed the square more quickly than the rest

and entered the loggia at the foot of the Campanile. Mrs. Meredith looked round at her companion.

"I think I see Mr. Kyrle coming up," she remarked.

Aimée turned with a slight start from the contemplation of the Adriatic. "How do you know that it is Mr. Kyrle?" she asked. "It may be any one."

"I know because I told him that we were to be here," returned the other, carelessly. "I thought the poor fellow needed a little relief from the society of Lydia. He really begins to look worn and pale under the ordeal."

"I can not see why you should draw such a conclusion," said Aimée. "If he did not like Lydia's society, he need not endure it. A man can do what he likes in such matters."

"Simpleton! is that all you know about it?" said Fanny. "Why, unless he absolutely runs away, a man is helpless in the hands of a woman who knows how to play such a game as Lydia is playing. And this man does not want to run away, because he adores *you*."

"Fanny!"

"It is quite true. He adores you, and yet he is so afraid of your fortune that he dare not approach you. He does not believe that a poor man has any right to try to marry a rich woman."

A flush that seemed borrowed from the sunset was now on Aimée's face. She cast a glance of reproach at her cousin.

"If it is true," she said, hurriedly, "why have you chosen such a time to speak of it?"

"Because I thought it only a matter of justice to let you know that he does not endure Lydia's attentions because he likes them," replied Fanny, coolly.

They were silent then, for steps were now heard inside the tower, ascending that inclined plane up which tradition tells that Napoleon rode his horse; and a little later Kyrle stepped on the platform.

The moment he appeared, Fanny Meredith saw that there was a change in him—a glow in his sunburned cheek, a light in his eye, and the air of a man who had burst some bond. She looked at him with surprise, and as he walked up to her—not seeing Aimée, who

had retreated to the other side of the tower—she said, involuntarily:

"What is the matter? You look—unlike yourself."

"Do I?" he said, with a thrill of excitement in his voice. "Well, that is not strange. I am *not* myself—that is, I am not the man you parted with this morning, but quite another. Allow me to introduce myself to you as a millionaire."

She gave a cry, and clasped her hands. "Your uncle is dead, and has left you his money, after all!" she exclaimed. "O Lennox, I am so glad!" Then she turned swiftly and ran across the platform. "O Aimée!" she cried, "you must congratulate Mr. Kyrle. He has just come into a large fortune."

When Aimée turned, she and Lennox were both pale—he, because he had not entertained the least expectation of finding her there; and she, on account of this unexpected sequel to those last words of Fanny's, which were still ringing in her ears.

"I hope Mr. Kyrle will accept my congratulations," she said, "although"—and she

smiled a faint, tremulous smile—"I am not sure that to inherit a great deal of money is always such good fortune as the world believes."

"Ah," said Fanny, "such skepticism may do for people who have inherited it. But I do not think Mr. Kyrle will quarrel with his good fortune."

"No," said Lennox, quietly, "I would be very far from quarreling with it—if it were really mine."

"If it were really yours!" repeated Mrs. Meredith, recoiling a step in her amazement and disappointment. "What do you mean?"

Lennox looked at Aimée. "I will tell you," he replied, "what I mean. When I said, a moment ago, that I am a millionaire, I said what is exactly true; and ever since I read the letter announcing the news to me I have been playing with the sensation, with the idea, of being rich and free, and altogether living in a fool's paradise. For"—his voice changed—"it is true that the fortune is mine, but it is also true that I can not retain it."

"Good Heaven! why not?" cried Mrs.

Meredith; while Aimée said nothing, but looked at him with all her soul in her eyes; and he, gazing into those eyes, answered:

"Because it is by an accident, not by the intention of my uncle, that I inherit this fortune. It has long been his intention, of which I was well aware, to found with his wealth some great charity to perpetuate his name, and his will to that effect was drawn up many years ago. Lately he wished to alter it in some particulars, and directed his lawyer to draw up a new will according to his directions. Before this will could be signed he died suddenly of apoplexy, and the older will having been destroyed, I inherit the property as nearest of kin."

"Now, I call that providential!" said Fanny, in a tone of devout thanksgiving. "I do not know when I have heard anything that gives me so much pleasure! To think of that old—ahem—gentleman being so outwitted at last, and so thwarted in his desire to cheat you! For I call it absolute cheating, when a man leaves his property away from his nearest relative and natural heir."

"Opinions differ on that point," said Lennox. "I hold that a man's property is his own, to do with what he will; provided, of course, that he does not neglect his duty to his children. But that duty does not extend to a nephew, especially one who declined all that he offered, and chose another path in life. No, it seems to me that my plain duty is to regard that unsigned will as a valid instrument, and to execute it."

There was a minute's silence after he finished, for both of his hearers were completely taken by surprise. Fanny Meredith fairly gasped with amazement before she cried:

"Why, it is worse than quixotism—it is absolute madness! I have never heard of such a thing in my life! What you threw away before, when you went against your uncle's wishes, was bad enough; but this—!" Words failed her: tears absolutely came into her eyes. "O Lennox," she said, imploringly, "you surely will not do it!—Aimée, for Heaven's sake, speak to him! He will listen to you!"

Aimée flushed, but Lennox turned to her

quickly. His face was set in resolute lines, but there was something in his eyes—a wistful, pathetic expression, as of one asking help—which touched her deeply.

"Tell me," he said, simply, "am I not right?"

It was a subject on which few people would have cared to offer advice, unless, like Fanny Meredith, they offered it on the side of worldly common-sense; but Aimée did not hesitate. She answered as simply and directly as he had asked:

"Yes—as far as I can judge, I think that you are right."

Fanny Meredith threw up her hands, as if appealing to earth and heaven against such folly.

"I think you are both mad," she said, "and I really feel constrained to seek some saner society."

With this, before either could utter a word or make the least effort to detain her, she had turned and fled. For an instant they stood confounded, listening to the sound of her flying feet down that incline which is a

veritable "*facilis descensus.*" Then murmuring something quickly, Aimée made a motion to follow; but the consciousness of being a millionaire, were it only for an hour, gave Lennox courage and resolution.

"Pray do not go," he said, earnestly; "she will be back presently, or—we can follow her. But first I must speak to you; I wish to ask your advice."

"I scarcely think that I am fitted to advise you," she said, pausing at his request, but looking away from him.

"You are eminently fitted," he replied, "because your opinion is of infinite value to me, and your approval worth more to me than that of any one else in the world. Indeed, if *you* approve, I care not who else disapproves." He stopped for an instant, then quickly went on: "I thank God that the temptation to keep this money has not overpowered me, for it has been great. Do you know why? Because it seemed to put within my reach a prize which before had seemed as far from me as heaven; at least, it made effort possible, it gave me leave *to try*. Before, how

could I, how dared I, think of saying to one dowered like a princess, 'I love you'? But if, with this fortune in my hand, I said it, no one could doubt my sincerity, no one could think that I sought her for anything save herself—herself, so far above all that a man could offer or give, that if he brought the wealth of the world he would still be unworthy of her!"

He paused, overpowered by his own emotion, and hardly expecting an answer from Aimée. He could not see her face, for she had turned away from him, but he saw that she was trembling, and he was amazed by the clear steadiness of the voice in which she spoke after a moment.

"What a man could say with a fortune in his hand, he might surely—unless he thought more of money than of his own manhood—say without it."

"May I?" he cried, almost incredulously. "You will let me say it—I, who had nothing yesterday, and will have nothing to-morrow! —you will let me tell you that I love you with all my heart?"

Another pause, and then—"If that be true," said the sweet voice, "why should it matter that you had nothing yesterday or that you will have nothing to-morrow?"

"It matters," he answered, "in the opinion of the world, which is quick to say of such a man—"

"But, a moment ago, I thought that it was my opinion alone which mattered," she interposed.

"It *is* yours—yours alone," he replied. "And if you tell me that I may hope, the scorn of the whole world can not hold me back from striving to win you."

She turned a beautiful, smiling face toward him. "It seems to me," she said, "that a man who possesses or who has refused a fortune of a million or two can hardly fear that his disinterestedness could be questioned. But I"—her voice sank a little—"I do not think I should have needed the test."

Mrs. Meredith, sitting quietly below in the loggia of Sansovino, grew rather tired of waiting before the two from above came down to

seek her. She rose, and looked at them with a smile.

"Well," she said, innocently, "have you settled the matter? Is the fortune to be given up, or retained?"

"The fortune!" said Kyrle. "I had forgotten it; but, of course, it is to be given up."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Meredith. She looked at him curiously, this man who was capable of such wild quixotism, and said to herself that certainly things were better as they were. There was no danger that Mr. Meredith would ever be troubled by any scruples which would cause him to resign *his* fortune. Then she shrugged her shoulders gently. "I suppose it is quite useless to argue with you," she said, "but, at least, the fortune has done you a good turn, and I advise you to say nothing to any one else of your intention of resigning it. *Do* the thing, if you like, when you return to America, but don't talk of it now. It is yours until you choose to give it away, so pray take the great advantage it will give you."

She did not say in what way, but Kyrle knew to what she alluded; he knew that this

wealth would render it difficult for the Joscelyns to object to him. He looked doubtfully at Aimée.

"That," he said, "would seem like sailing under false colors; or, at least, like winning what I most desire by a false representation."

"Now, Heaven grant me patience!" said Mrs. Meredith, impatiently. "But is not the fortune yours?"

"For the present, yes," he answered.

"Then, why on earth should you take people who are not your friends into your confidence with regard to what you mean to do with it?"

"Simply," he replied, "because those people have a right to know what is my true position in life, and an accident like my uncle's unsigned will does not affect that position. Am I not right?" said he, turning to Aimée.

"I think that you are," she answered, quietly.

"Very well," said Mrs. Meredith, "go your own way. I wash my hands of you both; but I am very sure that before you are done

with this affair you will wish that you had followed my advice."

IX.

THE event more than justified this prediction. The storm which burst when Kyrle proposed himself to Major and Mrs. Joscelyn as a suitor for Aimée was such as the latter, with all her experience, had never known before. They would not have received the proposal of a prince had it been possible to refuse it, for they were resolutely determined to retain control of the heiress and her fortune. But a man who by his own acknowledgment had nothing, yet was capable of throwing away a million or more dollars—words were too weak to express their opinion of him! They rejected his suit with scorn, and the major grew fairly inarticulate when trying to express himself with regard to such unparalleled audacity.

A penny-a-liner, a scribbler for newspapers, possessing not a dollar in property, yet

so insane as to refuse a fortune for an absurd scruple! By Jove, a raving maniac would be as suitable a match! Never should Aimée throw herself away in such a manner—never! If it were necessary, they would constrain her for her own good. She should not wreck her life and her fortune by marrying a madman.

But the time had come when they were to learn what was in Aimée. She had so submissively yielded to their demands hitherto that they expected her to yield now; but it was characteristic of her that the strength which her nature possessed only manifested itself on rare and supreme occasions, so that she now and then took even those who knew her best by surprise. She certainly took her tyrants by surprise on this occasion. Quietly, but steadily, she faced them like a rock.

"I shall marry Mr. Kyrle," she said. "I am sorry if my choice does not meet with my mother's approval; but it is a matter which concerns myself alone, and I can not suffer dictation with regard to it."

The major stormed, Mrs. Joscelyn tried tears and entreaties, culminating in hysterics,

but Aimée remained unmoved. She calmly repeated her ultimatum, and left them.

Then, in view of the gravity of the situation, another family council was held. Percy came, pale and venomous with the shock of hearing that his worst fears had been realized, and Lydia with a suspicious redness around her eyes. She not only shrank in anticipation from the bitterness of her brother's taunts and reproaches upon the failure of her effort to attract Kyrle, but there was a sting in the failure itself, for her fancy was of the order that went out to any man who approached her, and her eagerness to detain the young correspondent at her side had not been dictated only by regard for the family interest.

Percy condescended to throw her but one stinging word. "I was a fool to trust to such poor arts as yours," he said. "Of course, the man was only amusing himself with your vanity and laughing in his sleeve at all of us. You have failed totally in keeping him from Aimée; have you succeeded better in discovering anything about his past relations with Mrs. Meredith?"

She shook her head. "No," she answered, in a crestfallen tone. "I have never been able to draw anything from him, though I have tried. But I am sure that I am right—that there was something between them in the past!"

"So am I," he retorted, "but what good is there in being sure when one has no proof? You might have got that out of him if you had done no more! But, even without proof, I have made up my mind to see what can be accomplished by threatening Mrs. Meredith with exposure. *Toujours l'audace!* She may believe that I know everything. Heavens! if I only did—"

He glared at poor Lydia as if it were her fault that he did not, then turned abruptly to his father. "If I fail in what I am going to try," he said, "we must adopt a policy of stratagem. Drop all appearance of opposition, but insist upon returning at once to Paris. The first and essential thing is to separate Aimée from the Merediths. Separating her afterward from Kyrle will be comparatively easy."

"She is—ah—um—very determined," said the major.

"So is every girl who fancies herself in love; what does that matter? She will learn that her determination must bend before ours. For myself, I will hesitate at *no* means to accomplish this. Are you not ready to say the same?"

Under the challenge of that domineering and unscrupulous glance the major fidgeted, cleared his throat nervously, but finally spoke. "Yes," he said, "I think that any means would be—ah—justifiable, to prevent a thing so mad as what she declares her intention of doing."

"Then everything is settled," said Percy, with sharp decision. "Make preparations for leaving Venice immediately. Whether I succeed or fail with Mrs. Meredith, that must be done. Give Aimée no excuse for refusing to go. Promise anything now. Once away, she will be in our hands, and the rest is easy."

Even Lydia shuddered a little at the last words. To be in Percy's hands, at Percy's

mercy, was surely a fate not to be desired, and that, she knew, was what it meant; for he ruled them all, and his father and step-mother would consent to whatever he proposed. With the last words he rose.

"Now," he said, "I am going to try intimidation with Mrs. Meredith. If I succeed, our work will be easier; if I fail, nothing will be lost. In any event, we go."

Fanny Meredith was walking restlessly about her sitting-room, waiting for the news from Aimée, which Aimée had not yet come to give. Lennox had looked in after his interview with Major and Mrs. Joscelyn, made his report, received the sarcastic congratulations of his ally on having brought about exactly the result she had predicted, and which she supposed he had desired, and then taken his departure—for he felt as if solitude was at that moment the only thing he craved—solitude to dwell upon the look and the tone of Aimée when she put her hand in his as he was going, and said: "Do not let any of this trouble you. I shall not change." Change! He could have

laughed at their folly in fancying they could change her. How well he knew that light in the brave, dark eyes, and the unflinching resolution which it indicated!

After his departure, Fanny looked for Aimée to appear shortly; but as time went on and she did not come, Mrs. Meredith grew restless and impatient. What was the matter? Even her courage shrank from bearding the lion in his den—that is, the enraged family in their own apartments; but she decided that if Aimée did not come soon, she would go and learn what detained her. It was just after this resolution had been formed that a knock at the door was followed by the appearance of Percy Joscelyn.

He was perfectly calm in outward bearing, but his quietness of manner did not deceive Fanny for a moment. She knew in the first glance of his eye that he had come for war, and she felt at once scornfully ready to meet it. What could Percy Joscelyn say that would matter to her? She threw back her head and met him with the weapon that always came to her most readily, that of mockery.

"Why, Percy," she said, "this is a very unexpected pleasure. It is not often you are good enough to come to see me alone. But I suppose you want to talk over such an interesting event as Aimée's engagement."

"Not exactly," replied Percy, blandly, though his glance became more venomous than ever. "I do not consider that Aimée's engagement can take place without the consent of her parents and guardians; but I wish to congratulate you on your success in getting rid of an old lover who might tell awkward stories, by the simple expedient of stopping his mouth with an heiress."

There was a moment's pause. The gauntlet had been flung down, and he stood with his hand on the back of a chair, waiting to see how she would take it up. As for Fanny, astonishment rather than lack of courage held her silent for the short space of time in which they regarded each other. Then she said, with more dignity than any one could have imagined her capable of displaying:

"So you have come simply to insult me. That, at least, makes matters clear. I under-

stand and can allow much for your disappointment with regard to Aimée; but I do not intend to listen to such insinuations as you have just uttered. Be good enough to leave my room."

She lifted her hand and pointed to the door, but Joscelyn did not stir. On the contrary, he held his position with an air of determination, as he held her glance by the steadiness of his own.

"It will not be well," he said, "for you to insist upon my leaving before I have finished what I have come to say. I know that Kyrle was your lover before you were married, and that you jilted him for a richer man. In order to deceive that man, you have represented him as having been the lover of Aimée. This is a pretense which might blind Mr. Meredith, but nobody else; and I hardly think it would blind *him* very long if one took the trouble to tell him the truth. Now, I do not propose that Aimée shall be bargained away to save your secrets, so I plainly give you your choice: send this fellow away, as I have no doubt you have the power to do, or

Mr. Meredith shall know the whole truth about him and you!"

"My dear," said Fanny Meredith afterward, in describing the scene to Aimée, "I was astonished at myself. You know I always was a coward, and I had no doubt that the horrid wretch did know everything, as he said, and would tell it to Tom. But, for the life of me, I *could not* quail before him! I felt such contempt for him, and such a sense of outrage that he should dare to threaten me in that manner, that I suppose it was anger that made me as brave as a lion."

Whatever was the force supplying courage, whether anger or disdain, she did not exaggerate in saying that she showed no sign of quailing before Percy Joscelyn's threats. She drew her brows together, and her eyes blazed as they looked at him. In that instant he felt that he had made a mistake—that to intimidate this woman was not possible.

"What a contemptible creature you are," she said, in a clear, vibrating tone, "and what a fool besides, to think that you could accomplish anything with *me* by such a method as

this! I will not condescend to answer your insolent assertions and insinuations. If you can induce my husband to listen to you, you can tell him what you please. But understand once for all that every effort in my power shall be devoted to helping Lennox Kyrle to rescue Aimée from any further association with such a person as yourself. Now will you go—or shall I be forced to ring for the servants to put you out of my apartment?"

Brave as a lion she surely was, or she would have shrunk from the impotent and vindictive rage that almost convulsed Percy's countenance as he looked at her. There was little in his power to give which he would not have given at this moment to be able to crush her by some revelation such as he had hinted at, but which he now began to think had no existence in reality; for it seemed to him impossible that any one whose conscience convicted her of the falsity charged, could have been so daring and defiant. No, he had made a mistake, and yet—

What was this? Why did Fanny's expression change so suddenly and greatly?

Why did something like fear—yes, he could not be mistaken, it *was* fear—come into her eyes, as she looked past him at the door to which she had again haughtily directed him? He turned quickly and faced Mr. Meredith, who paused astonished at the angry scene before him.

"Fanny!" he said, involuntarily addressing his wife.

Fanny felt as if her last hour had come, but to betray this to Percy Joscelyn was impossible! The spirit that was in her still kept her head erect and her manner dauntless, although it had not been able to keep from her eyes that sudden expression of fear which had leaped into them. She now addressed her husband with admirable composure, notwithstanding that there was a perceptible quiver of excitement in her voice.

"I have just requested Mr. Joscelyn to leave the room," she said. "He has so forgotten himself, under the disappointment of Aimée's engagement, that he has ventured to come here and threaten me—"

"Threaten you!" repeated Mr. Meredith,

as she paused. He made a stride forward that brought him close to Percy Joscelyn, and then he stopped, controlling himself by an effort, but with all its usual genial expression gone from his face, and, instead, fierce indignation in every line. "What is the meaning of this?" he asked, sternly. "Explain yourself!"

A bitter sneer curled the other's lip. He could not, indeed, explain himself as he should have liked to do; he could not explicitly charge Fanny with duplicity which he only suspected, but he could at least throw a firebrand, and make, he fondly hoped, trouble between herself and her husband. So it was that the sneer came as he looked at that gentleman.

"Mrs. Meredith seems to have regarded it as a threat," he said, "that I requested her to use her influence over her old lover to induce him to relinquish his fortune-hunting scheme with regard to Aimée, or else I should have the pleasure of enlightening you with regard to some episodes of her past connected with that gentleman."

It was a desperate venture, this speech, for if he had been asked for the episodes— But

he fancied that he knew Tom Meredith too well to fear that, and the event proved him right. Mr. Meredith did not glance at his wife at all, but looked at Joscelyn himself with lowering brows and gleaming eyes.

"You are a cowardly cur!" he said, distinctly. "My wife told you to leave the room. I now repeat the advice; and if you do not follow it instantly, I shall be obliged to kick you out!"

"O Tom, Tom," cried Fanny, hysterically, "how good you were not even to gratify the wretch by listening to him!"

"Is it possible that you could have imagined that I would?" her husband asked. "Then I can only say that you don't know me very well yet. Even if I had believed what he implied, do you think I would have let *him* know it? But how did such an idea enter his mind?" he inquired after a moment, as he sat down. "Is he not aware that Mr. Kyrle was Aimée's lover long ago?"

Fanny stood silent, motionless, incapable, it seemed to her, of movement or speech. Never

had that old falsehood, told so lightly and heedlessly in the past, appeared to her so odious, so black, so dishonorable as now! Oh, what a vile return for her husband's trust and goodness to let him still be deceived, still believe a thing which was not so, still be less wise (so she fancied) than Percy Joscelyn, still think her better than she was! No, if it lost her his love forever, if he never, never forgave her the long deceit, she would tell him the truth *now*, while she had the saving grace and courage to speak. Perhaps Mr. Meredith had never in his life been more surprised than when she suddenly rushed forward, sank on her knees by his chair, and burst into tears.

"O Tom," she said, "I don't know that you will ever forgive me for having deceived you so long, but I *must* tell the truth! Lennox Kyrle was never Aimée's lover at all. He was mine."

X.

"And he took it like an angel, my dear," Mrs. Meredith said to Aimée a few hours later. "I never have credited Tom with any angelic qualities before, but I see now that it was because I did not do him justice. No one could have been kinder. He seemed really touched that I confided in him at last, only, he said, it was a mistake not to have told the truth at the time; and he was very severe about the false position in which you were placed. But I cried—Heavens, how I cried!—so he could not scold very much; and then he said he appreciated my telling the truth because it was entirely a voluntary act, since he was sure I did him the justice to believe he would never have listened to Percy Joscelyn. I *did* believe it, and that was the reason I was forced to speak. When he trusted me so, I was ashamed to feel how I had deceived him!"

"I have often wondered," said Aimée, "that you did not feel it before."

"No doubt I ought to have done so," re-

plied Fanny, penitently, "and perhaps I suffered more than you would believe; for I feel now as light—oh, as light as a feather, to think that there is no more need for concealment. Lennox will be glad. He was always so desperately indignant about you. I really believe that he fell in love with you at that time."

Aimée smiled a little. Probably Lennox had already told her so.

"And what a pleasant thing it is, Mrs. Meredith went on, "to reflect that this is the only result of Percy's attempt to make mischief—the viper! Aimée, do you know that there are dreadful possibilities of malice in that man? I shudder when I remember the expression of his face as he stood there"—she pointed to the spot—"looking at me. And what makes me shudder, is the thought of his having any power over you."

"He has none at all," said Aimée, a little haughtily. "What is Percy Joscelyn to me?"

"To *you?*—nothing. But he directs every act of your mother and stepfather, and therefore he has a dangerous power over your life.

I tell you frankly that I shall never feel that you are safe until you are married and out of their clutches."

"Safe from what?" asked Aimée, quietly.

"Well," answered Fanny, reluctantly, "I don't want to be melodramatic, or I should say safe from danger. I believe Percy to be capable of any wickedness. I did not think so until to-day. Hitherto I have thought him more mean than wicked, but it was as if I looked down into his soul when he stood there gazing at me with hatred in his eyes, and what I saw there was as black as—as the bottomless pit!"

"Fanny!" said Aimée, astonished and startled, for this flight of imagination was singularly unlike Fanny, who generally took things on the surface, and was not at all addicted to descending in fancy to the region of which she spoke.

"I mean exactly what I say, my dear," replied her cousin, with energy. "I assure you that I wish I could see you married to-morrow."

"It would have to be an elopement, then,"

said Aimée, with something between a smile and a sob, "for I have just been informed that we are to return to Paris to-morrow."

"Aimée!" It was fairly a scream that Mrs. Meredith gave. "You will not *dream* of consenting to go?"

"What reason have I for refusing?" the girl asked, wistfully. "I can not, without some reason, positively decline to accompany my mother. I have told them that I shall certainly marry Mr. Kyrle; but that has nothing to do with returning to Paris."

"It has everything to do with it!" said Fanny, in great excitement. "Why else should they think of taking you away in this manner? I tell you that they will hesitate at nothing when they have you alone with them. Aimée, *you must not go.*"

"What would you have me do, then?" asked Aimée.

"I would have you come with us." (It had long been settled that the Merediths were to go from Venice to Vienna, while the question whether or not the Joscelyns should accompany them had been left open.)

"They would never consent," said Aimée, "and I can not endure the thought of a struggle. When the time comes to part from them I should like it to be in outward peace, at least."

"That can never be," said Fanny, resolutely. "Do not hope for it. They will never let you and your fortune go without a struggle. The only thing to do is to get this struggle over at once. Come with us and marry Lennox Kyrle in Vienna. Don't tell me that you are not brave enough for it! I am sure that you are brave enough for anything."

"Brave enough to face danger—yes," said Aimée, simply, "but not brave enough to face struggle, pain, bitterness—"

"But you must face all those things if you remain with them, unless you buy peace by giving up Lennox Kyrle. For—do not deceive yourself—they will never consent to your marrying him; and if you are resolved to do it, you must at last leave them in a more unpleasant manner than this which I propose. Now, there is not the slightest difficulty about it, but if you were alone with them would it

be easy? I fear that it might be impossible, and I should not be there to help you."

"It is true," said Aimée, who was pale and greatly shaken. "It might be necessary hereafter—under worse circumstances."

"It *would* be necessary, and might be impossible," said Fanny. "Do you not see? This is the golden opportunity. Ah!"—she rose quickly and ran to the window—"I see some one who will help me."

She waved her hand to Kyrle, whose gondola was just drawing to the steps of the hotel. A moment later he was in the apartment and ready to second her proposal with all the eloquence that love could inspire. But even his eloquence might not have moved Aimée if she had not felt that he was right; that she was merely on the threshold of a struggle in which she might be worsted, since her opponents would be absolutely unscrupulous in the use of means. But Fanny and Lennox appreciated this, and both were earnest in urging her to take *now* a step which must be taken sooner or later.

But she was still undecided, when an un-

expected ally to the attacking force appeared on the scene. Mr. Meredith came in, and when he heard of the plan of the Joscelyns his honest wrath was stirred. "What! they propose to leave to-morrow, and carry you away with them?" he said. "Then there is one simple thing to be done: I shall go at once and engage your passage with us on the Trieste boat which leaves to-night."

Aimée rose and went up to him. The opinions of the others had not moved her as much as might have been expected. Fanny, she knew, was always inimical to the Joscelyns, and for Fanny's judgment she had not great respect, while Lennox labored under the disadvantage of being a lover who appealed to her heart. In yielding to him she felt that she would be yielding to those dangerous guides, the feelings. But if this practical, unsentimental man thought she ought to go, that was a different matter. She laid her hand on his arm, and looked at him with her dark, appealing eyes.

"Tell me," she said, "do you think I ought to go?"

The appeal of her tone was as great as the appeal of her glance; and the simplicity of her words touched the man whom she addressed more than anything impassioned could have done.

"My dear," he said, kindly, "I think that, if you are determined to marry this gentleman, the wisest thing you can do is to leave your family at once, for it will come to that at last; and there is not only no good in deferring an evil day, but at another time you might not be able to command the protection which I am happy to offer you now."

"Just what I have told her," cried Fanny. —"Now, Aimée, will you consent to go?"

Aimée's glance passed wistfully from one to the other, and rested on Lennox. "Yes," she said at length, "I will go."

Out into the night and the sea the steamer was moving, leaving the wonderful lights of Venice—a vision of an enchanted city—behind, while among the passengers on her decks one group of four persons watched rather silently the lessening radiance. They were all

somewhat subdued in feeling by the fierce storm of opposition through which they had passed—a storm that had shaken Aimée to the very center, yet had showed her the absolute necessity of this step. She stood now leaning on Kyrle's arm, her gentle soul filled with sadness at the thought of the bitterness and anger she had left behind, although beneath the sadness was a consciousness of freedom of release from bondage such as she had never felt before. Presently her spirit would spread its wings like a bird in the sunshine, exulting in this new atmosphere; but now she was silent, and Kyrle, divining what she was thinking, as well as her physical exhaustion after such stress of emotion, uttered himself no word, only pressed close against his heart the little hand resting on his arm. It was Fanny Meredith who said at last, with a sigh of relief:

"Well, thank Heaven, it is over, and we are safe; but I feel as if we had *all* eloped. —Don't you, Tom?"

"I can't say that I do," her husband answered, with a laugh. "But, by Jove, they

were desperate! The major swore he would lock her up, and I swore that if he did I would break down the door. I should have done it, too, without a moment's hesitation," the speaker ended.

"Wouldn't it have been simpler and less sensational to call in the police?" Fanny asked.

"The police!" Mr. Meredith scornfully blew out a cloud of cigar-smoke. "What the deuce could Italian police do in such a case? They would probably have arrested everybody, and kept us in Venice until proof could have been given of Aimée's age, and a lot of other nonsense. Do you suppose the Joscelyns would have hesitated to declare that she was still an infant? No; the simple and direct thing to do was what we did—carry her off by armed force."

"What was it you said to Percy Joscelyn when he followed us to the gondola?" Fanny inquired of Kyrle.

"I told him that if he came a step farther I should pitch him into the canal," that gentleman answered. "Probably he was aware that

it would give me sincere pleasure to do it, for he drew back."

"And yet people think that a fortune is a blessing!" said Aimée, with a long, quivering breath. "How gladly they would have let me go—as they did once—if it were not for my money! I felt like casting it to them, and bidding them take the only thing they cared for!"

"I am very glad you did not," said Fanny, practically. "They would have certainly taken it, and you have already cast them far too much. Don't abuse your fortune, my dear, because the Joscelyns are despicable. Money is a good, a very good thing to have. I only wish you could make Lennox believe it!"

Kyrle laughed. The strain of emotion was sufficiently relaxed now for laughter to become easy. "I promise," he said, "to do exactly what she wishes with regard to my fortune."

"Ah," replied Fanny, pettishly, "you only say that because you know she is as absurdly quixotic as yourself. It may be a very fine thing to be able to throw fortunes away," the speaker pursued, "but I am glad Tom has no

temptations of the kind.—Come," she said, taking that gentleman's arm, "I begin to feel the swell a little. Let us walk."

They passed down the deck, and the two left alone together stood silent for a moment, still watching the lessening lights of the fairy-like city. Then Kyrle turned his face seaward, to meet the fresh breeze that came from the wide sweep of the Adriatic, and his heart leaped within him, as if in answer to that boundless freedom of the sea.

"This is not exactly the sea-gull yacht in which I longed to carry you away," he said to his companion, "but, although less poetical, it is still bearing us toward the region of our dreams—that mysterious distance out of which it seemed possible that all things might come."

"*You* came out of it," said Aimée, with a sound as of a smile in her voice. "How well I remember the night on the sea wall of St. Augustine, when I waited for the sound of your oars, and presently you came from the sea, as now—"

"Now I am going back to it—with you," he said, as she paused. "There has been a long

interval between the beginning and the end of the romance; but it is fitting that the sea, which had a part in its beginning, should also have a part in the end. And I may be presumptuous," he added after a moment, "but I have no fear that we shall not find all our dreams awaiting us beyond that dim horizon of the future at which we gazed the other day."

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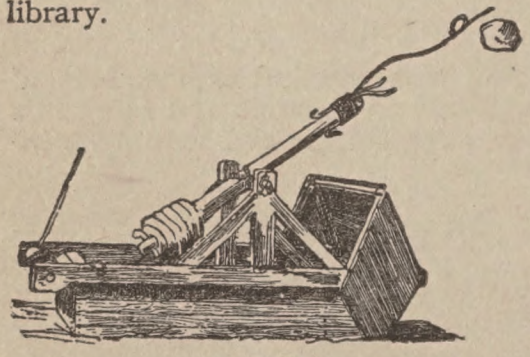

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